

ETHICS AND RECOGNITION IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: READING

AMITAV GHOSH, CARYL PHILLIPS, CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE, AND

KAZUO ISHIGURO

BY

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ABSTRACT

“Ethics and Recognition in Postcolonial Literature: Reading Amitav Ghosh, Caryl Phillips, Chimamanda Adichie, and Kazuo Ishiguro”

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This thesis undertakes a critical study of ethics in the postcolonial novel. Focusing on four authors, namely Amitav Ghosh, Chimamanda Adichie, Caryl Phillips, and Kazuo Ishiguro, I conduct a comparative analysis of the ethical engagement offered in a selection of their novels. I argue that the recognitions and related emotional responses of characters are integral to the unfolding of these novels’ ethical concerns. The ethics thus explored are often marked by the complexity and impurity characteristic of the tragic – an impurity which is productively thought together with Jacques Derrida’s understanding of “radical evil”. I arrive at this through deploying an approach to ethics in the postcolonial novel that is largely drawn from the work of Martha Nussbaum, David Scott, and Terence Cave. This approach is attentive to both the particular contexts in which the novels’ ethical concerns unfold, as well as the general ethical questions in relation to which these can be understood. Crucial to this is the concept of *anagnorisis*, that is, the recognition scene. Functioning as both a structural and a thematic element, it serves as a hinge between the general and the specific ethical considerations in a novel. There are three ethical themes that I consider across the thesis: the ethics of remembrance, the human, and religion. The works of these four authors cluster around these concerns to differing degrees and with differing perspectives. What emerges is that while each engagement is focused on the particular details that the novel represents, the range of perspectives can nevertheless be productively read alongside one another as interventions into these general concerns. Following from this I also conclude that as a suitable, if not privileged, form in which to engage questions of the ethical, the postcolonial novel hosts the ethical difficulty that I name as the tragic, and which is characterised by the term radical evil.

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INTRODUCTION

ETHICS AND RECOGNITION IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Ethics and Recognition in Postcolonial Literature analyzes the engagement with ethics in the work of several prominent postcolonial writers. Comparative in scope, the novels considered, by Amitav Ghosh, Chimamanda Adichie, Caryl Phillips and Kazuo Ishiguro, each present a strong ethical engagement, although along different trajectories. Each allows for a cross-regional assessment of the novel as a mode of writing well suited for exploring ethical questions. I will argue for an extension of the approach to ethical criticism put forward in Martha Nussbaum's work, with a crucial alteration: an emphasis on *anagnorisis* or the recognition scene, defined by several theorists, in particular Terence Cave. With my approach defined, I will be examining three ethical themes across the selected authors' works, namely, the question of the human, of remembrance, and of religion. First, however, I will situate my approach in relation to postcolonial theory more generally (this being the theory most often used to read the selected writers) and will explore different approaches to ethics in literature, before turning to outline how the thesis will unfold.

In his study *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) Robert Young notes the heterogeneity that is encompassed by the term "postcolonialism," and the risk of implying homogeneity by using it:

The drawback for any name that ends in an 'ism' is that it will be taken to imply a set of shared ideas, and a single, homogeneous ideology. Such a characterization will of necessity be a broad generalization, produced after the event.... It would be a mistake to assume that postcolonialism involves a unitary theory espousing a single perspective and position. (p. 63)

Such a broad generalisation is nevertheless of some importance. Young's own definition is that "postcolonialism" names "a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within [the] oppressive circumstances [of postcoloniality]" (p. 57) – that is, circumstances of global inequality and domination. What sets "postcolonialism" apart from "neocolonialism" and other similar terms is that in addition to criticising the "oppressive regimes and practices" that continue in global relations, it is also "committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice" (p. 58). This is not only a political or historical enterprise, but also,

crucially, an inquiry into the role of “European culture and knowledge [... in] the practice of colonisation and its continuing aftermath” (p. 69). Thus, as Stuart Hall (1996) argues, the concept of the postcolonial – deployed at “a high level of abstraction” (p. 246) – helps to mark the (uneven) historical and epistemological “transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonisation moment” (p. 246); or, in Peter Hulme’s words, the “*process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome” (cited in Hall, p. 246). It is within this understanding that “postcolonial literature” can be understood, as Elleke Boehmer (2005) notes, as writing “which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in some way or another to resist colonialist perspectives....to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization” (p. 3).

Exhibiting something of the tension between the general and the specific so characteristic of postcolonialism, what is important to observe in these considerations – and where this thesis situates itself – is the ethically committed character of postcolonial theory and criticism. After several favourable comparisons with feminism and Marxism, Robert Young points out that despite the incredible diversity within the field, there is nevertheless a loose unity: “A commonality of experience brings these together in concern about the violent injustice of the disparity in levels of material well-being of the different peoples of the world and the need for radical social change at a transnational level” (p. 66).¹ Building out from these critical observations, the understanding of postcolonial literature that frames this thesis is of narrative (and my focus is on narrative rather than poetry) that is politically and ethically concerned with the histories, legacies and underpinnings of the project of colonialism.

To say that postcolonial literature is ethically engaged is not new. Postcolonial literature, particularly in the novel form, participates in a long tradition in which the assertion of ethical positions is prominent. In one respect this is due to the fact that novels are inescapably ethically committed. This

¹ See also Boehmer (2005, p. 7), who similarly notes that “the postcolonial draws its energy from radical critique and efforts to intervene in situations of social injustice”.

is particularly the case in realist novels, which in presenting descriptions of reality represent, to some degree, the ethical side of life, even if these representations are sometimes reductively simple or crass (Phelan, 1996). As Abraham Yehoshua (2005) observes, “whether we like it or not, every artistic work that deals with human relations has in it a moral aspect because all human relationships may be evaluated according to moral categories” (p. 18). However even the most abstract, nonconventional or “unrealistic” work of literature implies an ethics: at the very least it implies that it is *worth* spending time on it rather than doing something else. As Booth (1988) argues,

Each work of art or artifice, even the simplest wordless melody, determines to some degree *how at least this one moment will be lived*. The quality of life in the moment of our “listening” is not what it would have been if we had not listened. We can even say that the proffered work shows us how our moments *should* be lived. If the maker of the art work did not believe that simply experiencing it constitutes a superior form of life, why was the work created and presented to us in the first place? (p. 17)

This at once implicit and explicit ethical stance of all literature is, as it were, the baseline of ethical criticism and is developed in different ways by various critics, of which several prominent ones will be considered below. It is also however through its frequent proximity to the “social novelists,” writers such as Charles Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, and Henry James, to name but a few, whose fictions grapple with ethical and political issues broadly conceived, that the postcolonial novel is linked to an ethical tradition (Nussbaum, 2001c, p. 74), which is signalled when Martha Nussbaum (2001c) names as a contemporary example of a social novelist one who is also known as a postcolonial novelist: V.S. Naipaul (2001c, pp. 75-76).

This connection with the European tradition of the novel leaves postcolonial literature in a double bind: the use of European and Enlightenment ideals and forms to criticise colonialism. Indeed, the spread of the novel form around the globe, disseminated as part of educational syllabi, was in large part due to its use in the cause of imperialism. As Appiah (1992) notes,

When the colonialists attempted to tame the threatening cultural otherness of the African... the instrument of pedagogy was their most formidable weapon.Colonial education, in short, produced a generation immersed in the literature of the colonisers, a literature which often reflected and transmitted the imperialist vision. (p. 87)

The literature of Europe was used by colonialists to bind the colonised to themselves.² And this legacy is still strong, as can be seen by the continued use of the novel form – often written in the languages of Europe – a connection that is strengthened through this tradition forming an object of critique. Yet, during the anti-colonial struggles and after the end of direct colonial rule, “European languages and European disciplines have been ‘turned’, like double agents, from projects of the metropole to the intellectual work of postcolonial cultural life” (Appiah, 1992, p. 88). As Boehmer puts it, since literature “contributed to the making, definition and clarification” (p. 5) of colonialist ideas there has been a corresponding “intervention by colonized people in the fiction and myths that presumed to describe them” (p. 6). It is thus through its deployment in the service of what we might call postcolonial ends that postcolonial literature is marked as such; and it is for this reason that I locate what is distinctive about the postcolonial novel’s ethics in its concerns with the legacies and histories of colonialism.

This gesture of using colonial forms to critique colonialism is an aporia that is poignantly felt in philosophy, particularly in ethics. In considering the ethical impetus of postcolonial criticism above, I quoted Young regarding the ethical concern which brings postcolonial projects together. At work here, even in such a general statement as this, are universal Enlightenment ideals. As Chakrabarty (2000) makes clear:

Modern social critiques of caste, oppressions of women, the lack of rights for labouring and subaltern castes in India, and so on – and, in fact, the very critique of colonialism itself – are unthinkable except as a legacy, partially, of how Enlightenment Europe was appropriated in the subcontinent. (p. 4)

The use of Enlightenment concepts in the criticism of colonialism and its legacies is ubiquitous in postcolonial criticism. Part of the difficulty with Enlightenment concepts is their pretence to universalism: the problem is not that Europe has these ideals, but that they were, and are, taken as applicable to all different cultures. As such, the need is for true universals, not European values masquerading as universal (Appiah, 1992). However, such an argument still does not escape proximity

² See also (Viswanathan, 1989), (Said, 1993) and (Macaulay, [1835]1935).

with European values when we consider its resonance with the Western “principle of universal respect” (Taylor, 1989, p. 67). Nevertheless, the need for universals remains, and there have been important arguments made by theorists such as Peter Hallward (2001) that if we abandon them it is only a matter of time before right becomes equated with might (pp. 177-178). Together with the need to work towards universals, however, there is also a simultaneous obligation to focus upon, and do justice to, the particular and idiosyncratic, a demand that is inseparable from postcolonialism (Hallward, 2001; Shohat, 1992). As will become clear, these two central tensions – the interplay between the universal and the particular, and the simultaneous use and critique of Enlightenment concepts, what David Scott (2004) calls “the paradox of colonial Enlightenment” (p. 131) – are decisive for my approach to ethics in the postcolonial novel.³

Locating as I do the distinctive quality of postcolonial literature largely (though not exclusively) in a novel’s thematic concerns, connects with the importance of focusing on the particular. While we are able to identify general ethical themes that are salient to postcolonialism, three of which feature in this thesis and will be outlined fully below, specific ethical dilemmas and challenges differ in each location and situation. To pay primary attention to a novel’s ethical meanings and impacts rather than its form, which frequently restricts a text’s ethics to an encounter with “otherness” produced by formal innovation, thus opens up ethical criticism to accommodate not only a wider range of ethical concerns, but also this particularity. This is not to say of course that structure is unimportant; it is crucial to a text’s meanings and will play an important part of my analyses throughout this thesis. It is rather to suggest that with respect to ethics in the postcolonial novel, form gains its importance from its (inextricable) harnessing to, and its shaping of, content. The emphasis on what I define below as the novel’s ethical sense is a response to what I consider are the limitations of approaches too determined by a Levinasian or Derridean⁴ understanding of ethics, though as will become clear this is by no means a rejection of either of these philosopher’s work in this regard. In tracing my reasons for

³ See also Slaughter (2007).

⁴Importantly, despite the significant overlap these are not identical approaches (see (Critchley, 1999) and (Critchley, 1992)).

focussing on a novel's ethical sense it is necessary to gloss three major approaches to ethical criticism, which will bring us to a discussion of the approach that will be used and developed throughout this thesis.

In the Levinasian/Derridean understanding of ethics, the ethical is distinct from the political and the moral: the latter two have to do with general questions of conduct in the political and the social realm, what Levinas calls the realm of the third; the former has to do with an unregulated, undetermined openness and address to the singular other. As Derrida phrases it in an interview, "when I try to think the most rigorous relation with the other I must be ready to give up the hope for a return to salvation, the hope for resurrection, or even reconciliation" (Kearney, 2004, p. 3). Any expectation of what the other should be like (just, kind, generous, etc.) or what the relation to the other should result in (reconciliation, salvation, etc.) begins to determine the relation, which is to slip out of the ethical, characterised by a radically open and undetermined hospitality, and into the political and juridical. For Levinas and Derrida, this unspecified relation to the other has the character of infinite responsibility and is the source of (though not the recipe for) law and morality/ethics as these are commonly understood.⁵

The most exemplary deployment of this understanding of ethics within criticism is perhaps the approach to ethical criticism argued for by Adam Newton (1995) in his *Narrative Ethics*. For Newton, "narrative ethics implies simply narrative as ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process" (p. 11). For Levinas (1998), the ethical and the realm of the third can be respectively designated by the "saying" and the "said," both of which are simultaneously present in our relation to the other in language. "Saying," is the pure relation between the self and other, the moment of encounter that is the relation to the revelation of the face, that is, the revelation of the other as

⁵ See for instance Derrida (1999a) and Levinas (1989). The distinction between ethics being the source of law and it being a recipe for law is very important: the former leaves the characteristics of the law undetermined, while the latter suggests that the law can be simply unpacked from ethics – a view which for Derrida fosters irresponsibility. See Derrida (1999a), especially (pp. 114-117), and Kearney (1999b).

resisting and exceeding any determinations we might wish to impose on it. It is “the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, *the very signifyingness of signification*” (p. 5, my emphasis). The “said” is the thematic content of the saying, the usual focus of our interactions with others which subordinates to itself the “saying” even in its very moment of revelation (p. 7). Applying this distinction to literature, Newton locates his narrative ethics in its “saying,” that is, the moment of encounter or contact when one reads a text. He explains, “One faces a text as one might face a person, having to confront the claims raised by that very immediacy, an immediacy of contact, not of meaning” (1995, p. 11).

There are three aspects that Newton specifies in his narrative ethics, giving it a “triadic structure”: “narrational ethics,” “representational ethics,” and “hermeneutic ethics” (pp. 17-18). All three are closely intertwined, but can be separated for clarity’s sake. The first, narrational ethics, is the “relational” aspect of reading, the encounter with the “saying” of the text “and the intersubjective responsibilities and claims which follow from acts of storytelling” (p. 18). Representational ethics designates “the costs incurred in fictionalizing oneself or others by exchanging ‘person’ for ‘character’” (p. 18). Hermeneutic ethics is closely connected to this, and designates the “responsibilities incurred in each singular act of reading,” responsibilities that accrue around the risk of representing other people (p. 19). Integrating these aspects we might say that for Newton, as soon as we pick up a book we are forced to respond to it regardless of its content, in the same way that we must respond to a person, regardless of what they say: responsibility – the obligation to respond – comes before we are aware exactly for what we are responsible. This responsibility is, however, primarily to do with the risks of representing others, giving us the hermeneutical responsibility of navigating the tension between both trying to “get” the other’s story, and the “lesson that ‘getting’ someone else’s story is also a way of losing them as ‘real,’ as ‘what he is’” (p. 19), that is to say, of replacing a relation to the face which always exceeds our comprehension, with a relation to its image which is comprehensible. What this means for the ethical reading of a novel will become clear in the conclusion where, with a reading of Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*, I will situate my own approach

in relation to Newton's and Phelan's, which I will consider in a moment. It is important to note though that the question of the ethics of representation, the ethics of the image, is a central concern for Levinas and one that I will also return to below.

It should be clear that Newton's approach is not overtly concerned with the thematic engagements of novels, which is to say that his concern with content has to do with the way in which these ethical responses in reading are dramatised (pp. 67-68). Derek Attridge's (2004b) approach to ethics in his *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* has certain similarities to Newton's. Attridge does not consider contact with the text itself as a necessarily ethical moment. Nevertheless, he deploys a Levinasian/Derridean conception of the other as exceeding our comprehension, arguing that an experience of alterity can occur in the reading of narrative. For Attridge, to speak about the ethics of literature is to speak about having an experience of otherness in the event of reading. This alterity is located in the originality or singularity of the piece of literature: "The experience of singularity involves an apprehension of *otherness*, registered in the event of its apprehension, that is to say, in the mental and emotional opening that it produces" (2004a, p. 67). The degree to which a work is original and singular is thus closely tied to the experience of alterity that it evokes, and so also to its ethics. Some works are more exemplary in this regard than others though: the text that "most estranges itself from the reader, makes the strongest ethical demand" (2004b, p. 11). Coetzee's late modernist texts are for Attridge of this exemplary sort.

There is an intriguing section in the opening moves of Attridge's argument which indicates some of the distance between Attridge and Newton's approaches, and begins to show why I nevertheless consider Attridge's too restrictive. It occurs in his discussion of the ethical and political benefit arising from the formal innovation of modernist texts.

To make this claim [about the ethics of formal singularity] is not to deny what has often been powerfully demonstrated: that a large part of modernist writing was insensitive to the otherness produced by patriarchal and imperialist policies and assumptions.... It is true that, with some notable exceptions, only in later developments of modernism have these [technical] resources been exploited in conjunction with a thematic interest in gender, race, and colonialism. (2004b, p. 6)

We can see here a distinction between the technical resources of form and an alignment of those resources with the meanings of the text. It is a concern with thematic content that is distinct from Newton's. However, it needs to be asked, how does this approach deal with the question of meanings and their impact on readers? Is a singular, innovative novel that is in its content insensitive to otherness ethical? As Wayne Booth (1988) poignantly phrases it, "It is not the degree of otherness that distinguishes fiction of the highest ethical kind but the depth of education it yields in *dealing with the 'other'*" (p. 195). Is ethics in a novel, then, reducible to the text's formal singularity? My answer to this has important consequences for how I approach the ethics of literature in this thesis.

Attridge wants to disrupt the opposition between form and meaning. He argues that "the literary use of language involves the *performing* of meanings and feelings, and that what has traditionally been called form is central to this performance" (2004b, p. 9). Although it is accurate to connect the meanings of a text to its form, this does not answer the question of their significance. To note the inextricability of form and meaning does not eliminate the fact that the same formal resources and innovations can be (and have been) an inextricable part of texts that are insensitive to alterity. Interestingly, this recognition does not prevent Attridge from emphasising the formal inventiveness of a text. The importance of formal singularity for Attridge, irrespective of the ethics of the text's meanings, can be seen as he shifts his focus from literature in general to Coetzee's work in particular.

Otherness, then, is at stake in every literary work, and in a particularly conspicuous way in the work that disrupts the illusions of linguistic immediacy and instrumentality. Among these works are some in which otherness is thematized as a central moral and political issue, and in these works modernist techniques may play a peculiarly important role. Coetzee's novels are cases in point. (2004b, p. 12)

Despite the reiteration in this passage of the distance from Newton in the importance of theme, it also illustrates their proximity. Otherness, for Attridge, can be seen as present in "every literary work" (keeping in mind that for Attridge "literature" refers to works that are singular), irrespective of either the work being a modernist text, or, importantly, of the work's meanings. The issue is formal singularity or originality, and works that have thematised otherness as a concern are a specific type within this broad categorisation – a distinction that implicitly includes within the broad category

those texts which are insensitive to otherness. Attridge appears, then, to call texts ethical that in his own terms of sensitivity to alterity are arguably also (thematically) not so. To locate the ethics of a work primarily in its inventiveness, in its singularity, can therefore be seen to overlook key ethical aspects present within its meanings.

It is not, it must be emphasised, that Attridge is unaware of other ethically salient aspects in the novel. This becomes explicit when he comments on the “critique of colonialism and its avatars” in *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*:

All this brutality and exploitation is certainly there in the novels to be felt and condemned, but it is not what makes them singular, and singularly powerful. It is what they do, how they happen, that matters: how otherness is engaged, staged, distanced, how it is manifested... (2004b, p. 30).

While this approach is perhaps effective for Coetzee’s work, it is too restrictive for literature in general precisely due to this subordination of other ethical concerns to the manifestation of otherness, a subordination which, as the above has shown, is due to the idea that “Modernism’s foregrounding of language and other discursive and generic codes through its formal strategies” embodies the insight that “literature’s distinctive power and potential ethical force” rests in precisely this opening “a space for the apprehension of otherness” (2004b, p. 30).

What I find unsatisfactory about these two approaches then, is the restriction of what is pertinent to a reflection upon the ethics of a novel. The exploration of environmental ethics and its tension with other ethical concerns in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, which I will consider in the next chapter, cannot be reduced to a question of formal alterity, of evoking an experience of otherness, nor to the ethics of transforming people into characters. This is not to say that these are completely absent, or that Attridge and Newton’s approaches are unproductive. Indeed the relation to others is often a significant feature, as is the case in *The Hungry Tide*. It is to suggest, instead, that this concern is present alongside other, equally important, ones. At the same time it is important to emphasise that my understanding of intersubjective relations is heavily indebted to the work of both Levinas and Derrida. Rather than rejecting their work, I am concerned with broadening their applicability; I am in

search of a pragmatic, strategic and context-based approach which will be productive in considering the multiplicity of specific ethical concerns present across postcolonial novels.

An approach that recognises the variety of ethical concerns, and which will clarify an additional difficulty that I have with Newton's and Attridge's approaches is presented by James Phelan in his book *Living to Tell About it* (2005). For Phelan, narrative is an act of communication: "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (p. 18). Narratives are therefore understood to be "designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways" (p. 18), and reading consequently involves the reader in a "feedback loop" (p. 18) between the "authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response" (pp. 18-19). The navigation of this "feedback loop" and the correlating "communication from author to audience" (p. 19), entails the full involvement of the readers' "intellect, emotions, psyche, and values" (p. 19) – an engagement that unfolds in tandem with the "narrative progression" (p. 19). It is within these layered interactions with narrative that Phelan locates its ethics. In first person or character narration, which his study focuses on, the ethical situation is particularly complex, calling for a response from the reader to the characters themselves, to the narrator's stance towards the characters and the reader, and to the implied author's stance towards the narrator, the characters and the reader (p. 20). What this suggests, and which will be seen when I detail Phelan's reading of *The Remains of the Day* in contrast to Newton's, is that the ethical emphasis is on how readers navigate the textual situation and all its attendant connections. Which is to say that while the narrative's representation of ethical situations are important, the main ethical question is how the reader negotiates this in terms of his or her own values (pp. 22, n.16).

Although Phelan's approach is suitable for engaging with a diverse range of ethical concerns – and indeed he distances himself from Newton because of his narrow focus (p. 22) – Phelan's focus on narrative as an act of communication results in too much of an emphasis on the author (implied or real) and the reader. I am in agreement with him about the importance of narrative sequence and

“textual phenomenon” to a novel’s ethical sense. My interest, however, is in the understanding of ethics that is explored as an argument within the bounds of the text, rather than primarily the ethical impact of a text upon a reader. The reader is of necessity fundamental to ethics in literature and my own analyses of the novels considered in this thesis; an analysis of character progression within a narrative, of narrative structure and technique all assume the point of view of a reader. However, when the reader’s response does feature in my analyses it is usually in order to sharpen the understanding of ethics that is at work within the narrative, primarily through considering the possible emotional impact of the narrative upon them. My interest in such cases is with the textual aspects that evoke the response. As such, it is accurate to say that I am invested in an understanding of narrative as a means of thinking through ethics, an understanding that is particularly productive in the context of postcolonial literature as I have described it above, and that takes its bearings from the work of Martha Nussbaum.

For Nussbaum, novels can make a definite contribution to ethics due to the presence of four features, the combination of which correlates to an Aristotelian understanding of ethics: the contingent and particular, the importance of the emotions, the incommensurability of goods, and the vulnerability of goodness. The first two features arise from the novel form itself, which emphasises the emotions, and the particular and contingent: novels “offer a distinctive patterning of desire and thought, in virtue of the ways in which they ask readers to care about particulars, and to feel for those particulars a distinctive combination of sympathy and excitement” (1990, p. 236). The last two features are not co-extensive with the novel, yet their presence results in a novel presenting, in its most complimentary form, the Aristotelian conception of ethics.⁶

The last two aspects, the incommensurability of goods and vulnerability of goodness, can best be illustrated from Greek tragedy, particularly Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (1986, pp. 34-38). The

⁶ That the novel can present the Aristotelian view of ethics in its most complimentary form is extremely significant for Nussbaum’s argument here, since it is this match between form and content that gives literature some of its importance for ethics (Nussbaum M. C., 1990, pp. 3-53; Nussbaum M. C., 2001c).

contingencies of life (in this case the conflicting wills of the gods) result in a situation where Agamemnon is under an equal demand from incommensurable goods: the life of his daughter and a divine command from Zeus. Having gathered his army to fulfil Zeus' command to conquer Troy, the expedition is becalmed by the goddess Artemis. As a result, starvation sets in and the only way to bring the needed wind is, by Artemis' command, for Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon must either refuse to sacrifice his daughter, and in addition to defying the will of Zeus everyone will die of starvation; or he performs a horrific act and the lives of his men are spared and he is able to fulfil Zeus's command. Either way, he is guilty: the contingencies of life have brought two incommensurable goods into conflict, with the result that the goodness of Agamemnon is impacted by that which is outside of his control. Nussbaum (1986) comments,

We can see that one choice, the choice to sacrifice Iphigenia, seems clearly preferable, both because of consequences and because of the impiety involved in the other choice. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that Agamemnon could rationally have chosen any other way. But both courses involve him in guilt. (p. 34)

This is, as Charles Taylor (1988, p. 807) notes, an understanding of ethics quite contrary to Utilitarianism⁷ in that the moral goods in question are not commensurable: "There is a good here of a particular kind, unsubstitutable by military success or divine favour, which remains forever destroyed and defiled". It is therefore particularly significant that while Agamemnon is not held responsible for the sacrificing of his daughter – it is the gods who are primarily to blame – he is held responsible for the "inference from the necessity of the act to its rightness, and the rightness of supportive feelings" (Nussbaum M. C., p. 36). Agamemnon thinks that because this is the correct action to take there can be nothing abominable about it, and thus concludes that sacrificing his daughter ceases to be wrong and does the deed with joy. It is for this that Agamemnon is held responsible and criticised (pp. 35-37).

This conception of ethics is further expanded with the importance of the particular or contingent and the emotions. As Nussbaum argues, for Aristotle, "Principles... fail to capture the fine detail of the

⁷ And for Nussbaum, ironically contrary to the Kantian understanding (pp. 48-49).

concrete particular, which is the subject matter of ethical choice” (1986, pp. 300-301). Principles, or general moral rules, are insufficient for navigating the contingencies of practical life. This is primarily because “practical matters,” where ethical decisions are made, “are in their very nature indeterminate or indefinite” (p. 302), but is also due to the possibility of encountering “particular and non-repeatable events” (p. 304). The result is that there is always something of a distance between the general rule and the practical, contingent scenario in which a choice must be made. (As will be seen in Chapter Three, Derrida picks up on this in significant ways.) Ethical choices must therefore of necessity be guided by *phronêsis* or practical wisdom, for which general rules are useful “only as summaries and guides; [practical wisdom] must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at improvisation” (p. 305). As Taylor summarises, “Moral understanding cannot be conceived simply as a grasp of moral truths or principles. To know what to do is to know this in a particular situation, and the relevance of no particular situation can be exhaustively captured in a set of rules” (1988, p. 810).

It is for navigating these particular, practical situations that the emotions become crucial. Nussbaum writes, “The experienced person confronting a new situation does not attempt to face it with the intellect ‘itself by itself’. He or she faces it, instead, with desires informed by deliberation and deliberations informed by desire, and responds to it appropriately in both passion and act” (1986, p. 308). Situations are marked for us by our desires; the “very way things present themselves to our desires” enables us to discern contours of pleasure and pain, the “to-be-pursued and the to-be-avoided” (p. 308). Without our feelings fulfilling this role, the skill of *phronêsis* fails. This does however require a specific understanding of our desires or emotions, one that acknowledges what Nussbaum in a later study calls their intelligence⁸. For Aristotle, “emotions are individuated not simply by the way they feel, but, more importantly, by the kinds of judgements or beliefs that are internal to each” (p. 383). Thus anger can be understood as a “composite of painful feeling with the

⁸ See Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001a) for an extensive study which, although arguing for what she terms a neo-Stoic understanding of emotions, is an extension and confirmation of the view that I use here under the designation Aristotelian.

belief that one has been wronged” (p. 383). If it later becomes clear that the offense was imagined, then the feeling of anger would subside. If it did not, we would consider the lingering emotion as “irrational *irritation* or excitation, not as *anger*” (p. 383). In fact, it is this understanding of emotions that allows one to assess them as rational or irrational, “depending upon the nature of their grounding beliefs” (p. 383). In this light, Aristotle’s famous comments on the catharsis of pity and fear experienced by an audience while viewing tragedy gains added significance: understanding catharsis as “clearing up” (pp. 389-390), the presence of pity and fear indicates an increase in self-understanding. For Nussbaum, therefore, our emotions are able to reveal to us insights about values that cannot be grasped by the intellect alone: “clarification, for [Aristotle], can certainly take place *through* emotional responses... Just as, inside *Antigone*, Creon’s learning came by way of the grief he felt for his son’s death, so, as we watch a tragic character, it is frequently not thought but the emotional response itself that leads us to understand what our values are” (p. 390, see also p. 45).

This understanding of the intelligence of the emotions will be seen to be indispensable for my analyses over the next chapters. What can be concluded here is that the novel as a form, is able to engage with ethical questions in an Aristotelian way, creating detailed descriptions of specific, unrepeatably scenarios which require an emotional response, and which can often (but do not necessarily always) represent a conflict of incommensurable goods. The usefulness of this conception of ethics for the postcolonial novel is in part due to it paying heed to the particular, without neglecting the universal, which is what I endeavour to accomplish in this thesis by relating the specific explorations of ethics in each novel to the three general ethical themes. Before turning to them, there are two additional ways in which this understanding of ethics is productive for postcolonial literature.

First, the conception of the ethical subject and the good which is presented here is quite different from that expounded by Kant and other thinkers of the enlightenment – a fact which David Scott (2004) notices. For Scott, Greek tragedy – and Nussbaum reads Aristotle as a “re-articulation” of the understanding of ethics presented in tragedy (Taylor, 1988, p. 809) – can be used “as an interpretive

framework for reconceiving conventional (largely Kantian) assumptions about moral agency and its implications for our understanding of justice, community, identity, history, and so on” (2004, p. 175). It is primarily the incommensurability of the good and the fragility of goodness that enable this. What these two features reveal is that “we are not entirely in control of our lives. Rather, tragedy presents us with a picture of ourselves as simultaneously authors of our ends and authored by forces and circumstances over which we have no – or little – rational control” (p. 182). Human beings are both passive and active, shaped and shapers, able to subject our environment to control and vulnerable to contingency and that which exceeds our control. This is a crucial displacement of a fully autonomous (humanistic) Enlightenment subject. This displacement is emphasised by the possibility of conflicting goods: “We may be essentially good people, have good characters, but acting in the world necessarily presents us with situations that are anomalous or that make conflicting and incommensurable demands on us” (2004, p. 185). Scott, then, is interested in how tragedy works to display the degree to which autonomy is delimited; he is also, however, interested in the structure of these tragic moments, as a model for engaging with the legacy of the Enlightenment, which brings us to the second point.

The Enlightenment, as I noted, presents us with a paradox: many of the resources of the Enlightenment are used to contest its legacy⁹. In tragic terms, the positive and the negative are inextricable. Scott argues that “the important point about tragedy is precisely that as a discursive and institutional form it embodied in a compelling way a distinctive capacity for ambiguity and paradox, a capacity to look in several directions at once” (2004, p. 187). In addition, tragedy also “warned of the mind’s propensity for theoretical closure” (p. 187; see also Nussbaum, 1986, pp. 23-84). The model of tragedy (and particularly, in Scott’s use, the tragedy of Oedipus) thus “makes a contribution to a kind of enlightenment thinking that sustains and even celebrates enlightenment virtues while at the same time opposing enlightenment hubris and the enlightenment drive to normalize and discipline the very

⁹ See Foucault’s “What is Enlightenment” (1984) for one instance of attempting to work through this difficulty, in which he seeks to affirm the critical spirit of the Enlightenment, while resisting its hubris.

subjects it seeks to emancipate and empower” (p. 188). The ability of tragedy to host paradox, ambiguity and incommensurability thus keeps the irresolvable tension between the Enlightenment’s “good” and its “bad” productively alive.

This is then a further advantage of this approach to ethics (both in the novel and in general) for postcolonial criticism, required as it is to not only negotiate the tension between the universal and the particular but also the “paradox of colonial enlightenment” (Scott, 2004, p. 131). This is not to say that in the following chapters I will be looking solely for such clear moments of tragic conflict. While this understanding of ethics underpins this study and will be particularly useful in the analysis of Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, where there is an explicit conflict of two values, what I am primarily concerned with is the tragic as a figure of ethical impurity. In her lectures titled *Religion and Literature* (1971), Helen Gardner provides a useful overview of different understandings of tragedy that will assist in clarifying what I mean. What is common to theories of tragedy, Gardner notes, is that it “includes, or reconciles, or preserves in tension, contraries” (p. 24); the variety rests primarily in what each theory understands this conflict to signify. For some, of whom the best instance is Hegel, the conflict – as for Nussbaum – exists between ideals and is ultimately comforting: “that though [tragedy] shows us a world of mutability and irrationality, it shows us in the end a world that has meaning and rationality and is governed by laws. Some with crudity and others with subtlety have attempted to find in tragedy a justification of the universe as ultimately making sense” (pp. 25-26). In this understanding, the conflict expressed in tragedy is revealed as meaningfully part of a greater rationality, rather than exhibiting bare chaos. A somewhat less consoling understanding is located in the work of the “Glasgow School,” for which tragedy “vindicates the universe only in the sense that it displays a universe that provides the opportunity for the existence, and the exercise, of virtue” (p. 28); virtues are not part of a grander rationality, but exist only for themselves. However, the most austere theories are found in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. For Schopenhauer, “the end of tragedy is to display the ‘terrible side of life’ and by so doing give us ‘a significant hint of the nature of the world and of existence’” (p. 29). Instead of revealing an order that supersedes the chaos of conflict, tragedy

exposes something of how the world truly is. Nietzsche's theory is similar, though more "thrilling and beautiful" (p. 30): "Tragedy is to him 'the art of metaphysical comfort', reconciling us to life by showing it as a sublime spectacle, and to the universe as work of unmoral art" (p. 31). Revealing something of the "unmoral," chaotic character of the universe, tragedy for Nietzsche is comforting – but due to producing acceptance in the viewer, rather than exhibiting a greater rationality that orders the universe.

After noting a couple of other perspectives, Gardner concludes her overview with the formula of tragedy she considers the most persuasive, put forward by Beethoven, "scrawled, perhaps in jest, above the opening bars of the last movement of his last quartet: 'Muss es sein?' [Should it be?] 'Es muss sein.' [It should be.] He wrote above the whole movement the words *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* 'the Difficult Resolution'" (p. 34). What differentiates the question and the answer is "hardly more than an inflection of the voice... Protest and acceptance are like expressions on the same face" (p. 34). The conjunction of affirmation and rejection, of positive and negative – the *difficulty* of which Gardner speaks here – is what is of interest to me. In the forthcoming analyses there are frequent instances of ethical difficulty where evil and good are not easily decidable, decided upon, or separated: from clashes of values in *The Hungry Tide*, to morally ambiguous characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to the dramatisation of ethical failure giving rise to ethical affirmation in *Crossing the River*. And it is in this generalised sense of tragedy as a figure of impurity, that I characterise the ethical explorations in these novels as bearing a tragic character. This can be further sharpened by passing the concept through Derrida's understanding of "radical evil".

"Radical evil," Geoffrey Bennington (2001) explains, is the "essential, constitutive *pervertibility* of the ethical as part of its being-ethical, its condition of possibility and impossibility" (p. 43). The phrase, "radical evil," is Kantian but its relevance as described here, Derrida argues, extends to ethics in general (p. 54). It designates the idea that the *possibility* of evil can never be eradicated. Bennington, in his *Interrupting Derrida* (2000), uses the example of the promise as a clarification: "A positive

condition of promising is that I might not keep my promise, for without such a necessary possibility, if the object of my promise necessarily followed from my promising it, my promise would not be a promise at all, but a necessary causal sequence" (p. 42). Evil is, then, a necessary possibility for the good. This is not to say, as Bennington makes explicit, that we are committed or resigned to welcoming or accepting evil. It is instead to assert that we cannot identify *beforehand* if an act will be good or evil. Therefore, a promise might always turn out to be broken, an act of hospitality "*always might* be a welcome to something or someone who will simply blow away my home, my welcome, the threshold at which I extend the greeting and the offer of food and drink in the primary ethical gesture according to Levinas" (p. 43); as Derrida phrases it, "ethics couldn't be ethical without the ineradicable *possibility* of evil" (Bennington, 2001, p. 54). The evil that is spoken of here is therefore "radical" "in that it is, 'in from the start' and is ineradicable" (Bennington, 2001, p. 50), it thus constitutes ethics' condition of possibility, as well as its condition of impossibility: ethics carries within itself the continuous possibility of its own undoing (p. 43).

There is, then, a generalisable impurity to ethics that can be seen in specific circumstances, from moments of conflicting values, to ethical affirmations that have ethical failure as their condition of (im)possibility. And it is in these terms that I can now clarify what is meant when I speak of the ethical sense of a novel. Rejecting, as Booth (1988) has persuasively shown ethical criticism should, any reductive approach to ethics in the novel, "ethical sense" gestures towards a more complete understanding of a novel's exploration of ethics, beyond any extrapolated "moral". A moral can of course always be extracted, and indeed there is often a discernible central concern in a novel. It is important, though, to enrich this by attention to the progression, character development, and narrative detail of the text. The ethical sense is therefore taken to refer to the engagement with ethics, and the explorations of the difficulties of ethical impurity, in the novel as a whole; it refers to the sense of ethical life captured within it. And if there is a discernible "point," neither can the ethical sense be reduced to it, nor can it be arrived at without the attention to detail and narrative progression which will be seen to occupy much of the space in the coming analyses.

In order to bring out the ethical sense in the postcolonial novels discussed below, my analyses will focus primarily on the movement of recognition within the text. Recognition is as a focal point for numerous general debates: the recognition of human value, the recognition of individual and/or political identity¹⁰, the recognition of animal value, and the problem of recognising too easily and completely. Recognition as *anagnorisis*, as a structural feature of fiction, however, is caught up with the particular, and often emotive, aspects of a narrative. Insofar as *anagnorisis* can be characterised as a more dramatic recognition, bringing these two senses of the term into proximity leads to a productive movement between them: structural recognition scenes can be seen to be crucial to thematic moments for the novel's ethical sense, raising the important question of the overlap, or lack thereof, between moral recognitions and *anagnorisis*.

As these definitions suggest, my use of *anagnorisis* takes its bearings from Terence Cave's extensive study in *Recognitions* (1988):

If *anagnorisis* is still to be used in critical practice, the dispersal of its meanings has to be accepted as a *fait accompli*. In those circumstances, the only way to recover some degree of rigour is precisely to chart the drift and the erosion and use the entire historical purview as an elaborate para-definition, a pluralistic configuration within which one can move from point to point without entirely losing one's bearings. (pp. 221-222)

In other words, the various ways in which *anagnorisis* has been used within the history of poetics, that is, the different types or objects of recognition, are gathered into a pluralistic definition of the term. Indeed, there is quite a range in the types of recognitions. They traverse from the more strictly Aristotelian recognition of a nominal identity, to the recognition of individual character, through to the even more dispersed "recognition of an obscured or hidden state of affairs" (p. 232).

Central to *anagnorisis* is the question of what is recognised. *Anagnorisis* is a formal feature of fiction, first discussed by Aristotle in the *Poetics* alongside its sibling *peripeteia*. It marks a shift in the plot and is often the cause of the sudden, surprising change of circumstances designated by *peripeteia*. The classical example is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In the play, the sudden and unexpected reversal of

¹⁰ See for this Charles Taylor's excellent essay "The Politics of Recognition" (1994).

circumstances (the suicide of Oedipus' mother/wife, his self-blinding and exile) is brought about by the recognition of his identity and the consequent recognition of his crimes of incest and patricide. Although *anagnorisis* is not always so dramatic, nor always so closely tied to the plot's climax, this serves to illustrate how the recognition scene marks a structural shift in the plot. However, Cave argues, "a recognition scene is not conceivable except as *both* a structural shift and the exhibition of some object of knowledge" (p. 225, my emphasis). It is precisely because the recognition scene is always the recognition of something or someone that it is open to being thematically filled by the fiction's concerns – among them its ethical preoccupations. As such, the question of what is recognised in a postcolonial novel, the predicate of the characters' revelations, becomes a useful lens through which to consider a novel's engagement with the particulars that constitute its ethical and political concerns.

In addition to this significance for a novel's ethical sense, the recognition scene as a *way* of knowing could also yield some important insights. *Anagnorisis*, as Cave argues, is a scandal, and a part of that scandal is due to the means of recognising also undermining the knowledge attained; the figure of recognition as a way of knowing is what Aristotle terms *paralogismos*: false reasoning (1988, pp. 39-43). Recognition always requires a proof, some form of evidence, and except for the type of recognition which Aristotle considered the highest and best – recognition brought about by the necessary cause and effect of the plot – the proofs are various tokens or signs. Yet the problem is that these proofs are insufficient. The tokens of recognition often lead, as with Odysseus, to misrecognitions as well as to recognitions. The example of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey* is paradigmatic: Odysseus is recognised when one of the servants sees his scar; yet by this reasoning everyone with a scar is Odysseus. Consequently, even when it is not thematised in the narrative, there is an inherent instability in the recognition scene: it can be seen to call into question the very knowledge it bestows. It is for this reason that recognitions relying upon tokens and signs were classed by Aristotle as inferior to the more "pure" recognitions arising from narrative cause and effect, without the use of signs (1988, pp. 246-247). Rarely, however, do recognitions arise from

philosophical reasoning, and this emphasises the contingent and the particular. It is worth quoting

Cave at some length on this:

However skilfully [recognitions] may be integrated into a deductive sequence, they are always contingent in some sense.... Yet they are seen to work, and their effectiveness often seems to depend on the fact that they emerge accidentally and unexpectedly: the marginal detail triggers the response of recognition where the more general resemblance fails. There could be no more graphic illustration of this than the sequence of recognition scenes in the *Odyssey* where the characters remark on the 'stranger's' resemblance to Odysseus but fail to draw the appropriate conclusion until the accidental discovery of an accidental scar. (p. 250)

The importance of the particular and the contingent in recognition scenes brings them into a productive proximity with the approach to ethics outlined above, not only in the importance of the contingent and the particular, but also the significance of the emotions. I have noted, following Nussbaum, that our emotional responses can give rise to recognitions. As such, *anagnorisis* could assist in further displacing the Enlightenment ethical subject, not only through the importance of contingency – and the possible emergence of a “tragic” understanding of ethics – but also through being caused by characters’ emotional responses. As Sara Ahmed (1998) notes, this by itself is a fundamental critique of the Enlightenment ethical subject, which is typically male and rejects the value of the emotions as “associated (negatively) with the feminine” (pp. 52-53)¹¹. This, as will be seen, is indeed the case in the works under consideration: repeatedly, characters navigate tragic ethical situations by relying on their emotional responses, which lead them to recognitions that alter their ethical understandings and, in so doing, give shape to the novel’s ethical sense.

There is one primary objection to this approach to ethics in the postcolonial novel outlined above that needs to be addressed at the outset. In discussing Adam Newton and Derek Attridge’s approaches above, both of whom draw on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, I noted the concern that the ethics of the image holds for Levinas. It is due in part to this concern with over-determining the other through representation that Attridge elevates an experience of otherness to the primary value, and that Newton specifies a hermeneutical ethics that grapples with the risks of transforming “person” into

¹¹ Nussbaum herself notes in an extended footnote this alliance between an Aristotelian understanding of the emotions and feminism. See Nussbaum (1990, pp. 42, n.76).

“character”. In moving away from their approaches, it is important to emphasise that this is indeed a proper concern, especially for a field of study that is invested in resisting and undercutting colonialist determinations. In positing recognition, and consequently gains in knowledge, as central to my ethical criticism, the question of certainty or of the illusion of grasping the other through recognition must be addressed.

A good instance of Levinas’ challenge to literature can be found in his essay “Reality and its Shadow” (1987).¹² As I have detailed, the ethical relationship for Levinas is the face-to-face. The face is the revelation of the other person in their infinity, that is, in my relationship to them even as they exceed every concept of them that I have. Nevertheless, we relate to them and to the rest of the material world, precisely through concepts by which “we maintain a living relationship” (p. 3). Art however does not relate to an object through its concept, but through its image. For Levinas every being, every person, “bears on his face, alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness” (p. 6). Even as we encounter a person or an object, their very materiality can be lifted like a second skin and made into an image: “Here is a familiar everyday thing, perfectly adapted to the hand which is accustomed to it, but its qualities, color, form, and position at the same time remain as it were behind its being, like the ‘old garments’ of a soul which had withdrawn from that thing, like a ‘still life’” (p. 6). As a result there is a fundamental duality to all beings: “We will say the thing is itself and is its image” (p. 6). The image is different from a sign or a symbol, since “thought stops on the image itself” (p. 6); it is opaque, drawing attention away from a fluid and living relationship to being, and towards the fixity of the “old garments” of its image that it leaves behind. In so doing, artistic disinterestedness, disengagement from the world, “is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility” (p. 12). Art is therefore caught up in this risk of irresponsibility. In substituting the image for the concept, we exchange the living relationship for one that is static, exchanging it for an “idol” (p. 8). The image is suspended forever in its moment: the Mona Lisa will forever smile, but forever the smile that is about to broaden never will (p. 9). Art is in this way an

¹² For an excellent extended analysis of Levinas’ quite ambiguous relationship to literature, see Robins (1999).

evasion of reality, of the living relationship to the object inextricably caught in the movement of time, and it is therefore ethically crucial that “the immobile statue [art] has to be put in movement and made to speak” (p. 13), it needs to be returned to the real world. This work is accomplished by criticism, which integrates the image back into the “human world” (p. 12).

We can say, then, that Levinas’ position, as Richard Kearney (2002a) puts it, “would appear to be that poetic imagining is fine, as long as it remains answerable to an ethics of alterity” (p. 91). Levinas is also however concerned about the fixity of images within the text, which is why he tends to prefer (though not exclusively (pp. 93-94)) avant-garde literature that is disruptive of its own representations (pp. 91-93) – not dissimilar to what Attridge argues for Coetzee and can be similarly seen with Sam Durrant’s (2004) approach to the same author, though for the latter literature is caught up in mourning rather than being about experiencing otherness *per se*. In addition to the possibility of viewing this thesis as contributing to the ethically beneficial work of “returning” literature to the “human world,” it is important to emphasise that not only does *anagnorisis* undermine itself as a form of knowledge and thus circumscribe its certainty, but the recognitions that I consider within the novels are moments of disruption and transformation where the character’s understanding of the world is altered, rearranged in order to make more space for the other. That is to say, the recognitions are not simply about the (racial, cultural, religious) other, but are about the recognising Self’s relation to them. The certainty of the characters’ recognitions does not fix their others in over-determined categories. Instead it accomplishes the opposite: through their recognitions they undergo a frequently painful and socially disruptive movement towards a more welcoming and open view of those who differ from them.

Part of what is at stake here, and a thread throughout this introduction, is the question of humanism. A highly contested term – and indeed, as Tony Davies (2008) points out, an incredibly polyvalent one – it is a major locus of the postcolonial critique of the Enlightenment,¹³ and one of the three ethical

¹³ See, for example, Gandhi (1999) , Durrant (2004), Scott (2004), and Spivak (1999).

themes considered in this thesis. It should be clear from the discussions above that the approach I take to ethics in postcolonial literature is deeply influenced by the need to rework and reconstruct, to use Césaire's phrase, "a true humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world" (cited in Young, 2001, p. 270). A similar conviction will be seen across all of the selected authors – all of whom find that the possibility of a common humanity is essential to their work. Most explicitly addressed in the work of Ghosh and Phillips, the humanism that both present takes an (ethical) subject who is semi-autonomous, vulnerable and embodied. In Phillips and Ishiguro, we will see the exploration of a more radical subject who is additionally dislocated from themselves, lacking full self-awareness. Even in the work of Adichie, where this question is not thematised, the navigation of difference that she portrays can nevertheless be understood as requiring the underpinning of a common humanity. The selected authors are therefore involved in precisely the tension that I have outlined above: the need for universals – primarily a common humanity, a humanism – balanced against the need for specificity, for a recognition and welcoming of difference.

The two additional themes – remembrance and religion – although separate have close connections to the question of humanism. Postcolonialism, as Durrant (2004) and Gandhi (1999) argue, is a matter of remembrance and mourning, of recovering lost and suppressed pasts – a suppression and loss that is inextricably tied to the violence of European humanism. It is primarily as a concern with recovery that the theme of history or remembrance is addressed in the work of Ghosh, particularly *The Hungry Tide*. In Adichie and Phillips, however, the central ethical question is *how* to remember. When the past is traumatic and violent, what is the relationship between the freedom of art and the obligations of commemoration? This is first introduced primarily with Adichie's novel on the Biafran war, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and is taken up again in both of Phillips' novels. Phillips' engagement, however, is the more nuanced. Navigating this ethical tension that surrounds remembrance, his carefully constructed narratives also expose the silences in the historical archive and thus return us to the question of lost and suppressed histories – with the notable difference that these gaps are left shrouded in silence.

The theme of religion is perhaps the most unevenly considered across the selected authors. A possible sub-category of the first theme, it is the work of Adichie that shifts it to the fore as an ethical concern in its own right. In Ghosh, we see religion deployed as either an alibi for colonial violence, or as a non-modern, hybrid discourse that is disruptive of attempts to grasp and understand the other. In Phillips' work religion is brought forward into a more discursive role, shaping the thought-lives and discursive possibilities of the characters. In Adichie, however, it is presented as a feasible mode of engaging with the world. A part of this is a necessary undermining of inhospitable and violent forms of religion – this is a central concern for the ethical sense of *Purple Hibiscus*. We also see in Adichie a way of being in the world that rejects some fundamental Enlightenment distinctions, primarily the separation of the secular and the sacred, a rejection that faces us with an aporia: the increasing rise of fundamentalism makes an assertion of secularism imperative, yet the idea of secularism is caught up in the binaries fundamental to the Enlightenment understanding of Man. Although this is beyond the purview of the current analysis, the potential productivity of this aporia is worth noting.

This thesis is structured, then, along a trajectory that marks a gradually evolving complexity of thematic ethical engagement. While all three themes are present in most of the selected authors, there is an alternating emphasis between them in the movement from Ghosh to Adichie, with Phillips engaging all three in a more complex and nuanced way – though with religion, as it were, bringing up the rear. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, while speaking to a dislocated, embodied subjectivity, does not extensively consider my other two ethical themes. He forms the substance of my conclusion because he returns us to a focus on the method of analysis deployed throughout the thesis, namely the functioning of recognition for a novel's ethical sense. In the chapters to come, this approach is tested through the differing styles and concerns of the selected authors, culminating in the highly fragmented narration of ethical failure in the works of Phillips. The work of Ishiguro brings this critical thread to an end in a consideration of a novel that privileges recognition, and has been analysed in ethical terms by both Newton and Phelan discussed above, thus allowing for a final affirmation of the approach to ethical criticism as I have defined and developed it across the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

ANAGNORISIS AND THE CLASH OF VALUES: AMITAV GHOSH

I

In this chapter I begin to refine my approach to ethics in literature through an analysis of two novels by Amitav Ghosh, namely *The Hungry Tide* (2005)¹⁴ and *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Both of these novels actively deploy *anagnorisis* as a narrative mechanism, as well as engaging to a certain extent all three of the ethical themes that I have introduced. Least directly engaged is the ethical theme of religion; as a major concern for Adichie, however, it is worth considering here too. In his study of Amitav Ghosh, Anshuman Mondal (2007) argues that Ghosh's approach to questions of religion and secularism are caught up in his negotiation of the tension between modernism/humanism and postmodernism. While the "authoritarianism, violence and coercive reflexes" of the postcolonial State need to be criticised, the "Nehruvian vision of a secular, democratic nation-state that accommodates India's 'diversity' into a syncretic unity" nevertheless remains essential for Ghosh as a "bulwark against the forces of religious and ethnic chauvinism" and the political and ethical risks these entail (p. 28). The accuracy of this assessment is borne out by the observation that religion in these two novels tends to be either a syncretic fusion of different languages and beliefs, as in the Bon Bibi myth in *The Hungry Tide*, or is subjected to critique when used as an alibi for violence and coercion, which we see with Mr Burnham's Christianity in *Sea of Poppies* (Hoydis, 2011, p. 329). Ghosh's negotiation of religion in these novels is not, however, an engagement with religion as such and therefore functions more, as it were, as a prelude to what will be observed in the work of Chimamanda Adichie in the next chapter – at which point I will explore more fully questions of the relationship between religion and colonialism. Of greater concern to Ghosh are the themes of history and humanism. The meticulous historical research that characterises his oeuvre has been well documented by critics. Mondal and Hoydis both observe that Ghosh is most concerned with histories or stories that fall beyond the pale of historical

¹⁴ First published in 2004. All references refer to the 2005 Harper Collins Publishers paperback edition.

narratives, involved as they are with the grand narrative of “modernity, development and Progress” (Mondal, p. 21); his interest is in “‘fragments’ of human experience that have been occluded from the historical record, and which find no place in such grand designs” (p. 21).¹⁵ It has been observed by critics that Ghosh challenges traditional historiography on two levels. Noting the proximity of Ghosh’s work to that of the Subaltern Studies collective, Mondal argues that a consideration of the necessarily increasing self-reflexivity of Subaltern Studies clarifies the effectiveness of Ghosh’s fictionalising of history. “Indeed, it could be argued that Ghosh [as a writer] has the licence to explore areas of the Subaltern Studies project that the historians themselves are prohibited from by virtue of their investment in ‘historiography’” (p. 27). The two novels under consideration here continue this concern with elided and forgotten narratives.¹⁶ In each case, there is a “forgotten history” that is fictionalised. With regard to *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh comments, “The Ghazipur and Patna opium factories between them produced the wealth of Britain. It is astonishing to think of it but the Empire was really founded on opium” (cited in Hoydis, p. 330). It is this “forgotten history” of the fundamental importance of opium to the British Empire – and its devastating effects on her subjects – that Hoydis argues Ghosh seeks to recover (p. 330). Similarly with *The Hungry Tide*: though less directly connected to colonialism, in this novel it is the incident of the Morichjhāpi massacre in the Sundarbans that is recovered, an event that until the publication of the novel “had all but lapsed into oblivion” (Tomsky, 2009, p. 57).

To limit Ghosh’s engagement with history as the recuperation of forgotten stories would, however, produce an impoverished understanding of his work. Ghosh’s concern with history exceeds a recounting of events, of cause and causality (Bose, 2003, p. 18). The second challenge that Ghosh directs towards traditional history resides in his humanising it, which brings us to the third ethical theme and the main focus of my analysis in this chapter. In an interview with Vijay Kumar, Ghosh comments that what he finds useful in his research is the recreation of singular “predicaments”:

¹⁵ See also Hawley (2005) and Tomsky (2009).

¹⁶ It is important to emphasise that this is not imply that Subaltern Studies can be reduced to a concern with forgotten histories. See Chatterjee (1993).

I think what is interesting about, say, history in terms of a novel is that history gives us particular predicaments which are unique predicaments, not repeatable in time and place. So that's what is really interesting to me.... So for me the research part of it that is interesting is to recreate that predicament faithfully, to recreate the details of that predicament. (Vijay Kumar, 2007, p. 101)

The primary interest of these predicaments, he continues, is “the structure of emotion that accompanies” them (p. 101). It is within this interest in the human experience of singular locations and historical events, that we can situate Ghosh’s concern to do justice to “cultural difference” (Mondal, p. 29), the representation of non-normative perspectives, while simultaneously emphasising “the underlying similarity of human experience across both space and time” (p. 29). As will be seen, this tension is particularly present in *The Hungry Tide* where, alongside a strong affirmation of a common humanity, the reader negotiates, together with the main characters, encounters with singular differences which “dispute the valorization of elite mobility” (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 116).

As this implies, Ghosh’s novels are all ethically nuanced and invested, and can be productively read in those terms: the epic historical tapestry of *The Glass Palace* (2001) that reveals the complex imbrications between the colonial and the postcolonial, and the difficulties of navigating these shifting, unstable complexities; the ethics of memory and identity in *The Shadow Lines* as these unfold across the instituted boundaries of nations and within the imagination. Each novel is ethically complex and valuable, as Hoydis’ (2011) recent study has shown. My privileging of *Sea of Poppies* and *The Hungry Tide* is due to two main points. For both, *anagnorisis* is central to their ethical sense, and in each case this connects with an important thematic concern for this thesis. *Sea of Poppies* presents Ghosh’s most explicit positing of a universal humanism, which is expressly accomplished through the interplay of concealment and revelation of *anagnorisis*. *The Hungry Tide*, for its part, raises a challenging ethical paradox that attends to environmental ethics, a field that is rapidly growing within postcolonial criticism.¹⁷ That this is again addressed through moments of recognition marks these two novels as well suited for an initial testing of the approach to ethical criticism that I have adumbrated.

¹⁷ See Huggan and Tiffin (2010) and Mukherjee (2010).

Sea of Poppies opens in India in 1838, just before the Opium Wars between England and China, and follows diverse characters as they either come to be indentured servants or to escort those servants on their transportation to the Mauritius Islands. Throughout, most of the main characters hide their identities in some way in pursuit of new lives, “escaping one life for another” (Schine, 2009), with the result that multiple social divisions become problematised. As Hoydis points out, in *Sea of Poppies* “Ghosh’s concern with border-crossing between castes, races and cultures” is presented “in a nutshell” (p. 328). That it is largely through the interplay between the concealing and revealing of nominal identities that this is accomplished, makes moments of recognition fundamental for the novel’s challenge to the permanence of cultural divisions and difference. Interestingly, the predominance of recognitions of identity makes this almost an “orthodox” use of the recognition scene. As I detailed in the previous chapter, Aristotle was primarily concerned with recognitions of family and political relations, of nominal identity. Importantly, the “severance from origins” (Cave, 1988, p. 227) that characterises this kind of recognition plot, “provides the narrative grounding for the ever-present possibility of a monstrous transgression: killing or mating a close relation. Incest and parricide, the themes of the Oedipal paradigm, are at least potential themes in most types of recognition narrative” (p. 227). For several of the characters in the novel, such as Deeti’s uncle-in-law, the breaking of the social barriers of caste, race, and culture are indeed a “monstrous transgression”. It is for this reason that Deeti and Kalua, who have broken the rules of caste, must hide their identity and flee their village. Similarly, Paulette hides her identity – a white French woman, she successfully passes herself off as Indian – in order to secure passage aboard the *Ibis*. It is precisely the intimate connection between recognition and transgression that Ghosh is exploiting here; except that, as these examples show, instead of revealing an accidental “monstrous transgression,” Ghosh’s characters intentionally deploy its possibility. In part through the intimacy of focalisation, the novel is quite clear that these transgressions are positive. Much of the tension in the novel results, however, from the possibility of exposure, and it is in the climatic revelation of these multiple duplicities and

transgressions, when all of the characters are fully revealed while at sea aboard the *Ibis*, that the ethics of this problematising of social divisions becomes explicit.

The idea of a common humanity, though it becomes explicit towards the end of the novel, underpins the multiple transgressions of cultural norms. It will emerge that in neither *Sea of Poppies* nor *The Hungry Tide* does Ghosh present a simple, or easy, recognition of a common humanity. In keeping with the tension between postmodernism and humanism that I noted Mondal has observed in his work, Ghosh does not minimise the power of social categories – neither in defining one’s sense of self, nor as present social realities. Nevertheless, the emphasis in *Sea of Poppies*, more so than in *The Hungry Tide*, is on humanism. There are several relationships in the novel that activate this theme: those between Deeti the pious widow of an opium factory worker and Kalua the low-caste ox-cart driver, Paulette the French botanist’s daughter and her Indian childhood companion Jodu, Neel the zamindar and Ah Fatt the opium addicted prisoner from Canton, and Zachary the American mixed race son of a freed slave and Serang Ali the leader of the lascars and wanted by the law. Throughout the novel, the imagery of rebirth or transformation as concurrent with breaking out of the moulds of social categories and as opening up possibilities for new life, is pervasive and is centred upon the figure of the frigate, the *Ibis*, a ship that has itself undergone a transformation being refitted from a slave ship to one more fitted for ostensibly free cargo, namely indentured servants and prisoners. As Hoydis describes it, the *Ibis* is “an equalitarian melting-pot” (p. 334).

The first transgression of social norms occurs when Deeti recognises Kalua as an individual human being, and not just a shadowy, if intensely embodied, member of a lower caste. Deeti, as a member of a high caste in India, should avoid any physical or eye contact with Kalua who is an untouchable. Their interactions are entirely governed by the rules of caste. Thus when Deeti’s opium-disabled husband is climbing onto the ox-cart which Kalua drives to make his living, Kalua does not help him “and was careful to keep his face hidden from him: he was of the leather-workers’ caste and Hukam Singh [Deeti’s husband], as a high-caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face would bode ill for the day

ahead” (2008, p. 4). This is not to say that there are no interactions between the castes. Indeed Hukam and Kalua converse “amicably enough,” but this conversing is completely determined: they do so with “never exchanging glances” (2008, p. 4).

Circumstances come together in such a way, however, that Deeti breaks the rules of her caste. One night, having run out of water and walking to the Ganga to refill her pot, she stumbles across Kalua who is about to be shamed and violated by local landowners. Kalua is a towering, powerful figure, “a man of unusual height and powerful build” (Ghosh, p. 49) but of a “peaceable disposition” (p. 50). Some prominent landowners from their region, using their power and influence, persuade him to wrestle for them. Making the landowners rich and a name for himself, there is soon an invitation to wrestle the champion of “His Highness, the Maharaja of Benares” (p. 50). It is a fight that Kalua loses due to his humiliation by a prostitute the night before who, upon seeing him, “was rumoured to have screamed: This animal should be mated with a horse, not a woman” (p. 51). Humiliated by Kalua’s defeat, the scene that Deeti stumbles upon is the landowners’ moment of exacting revenge.

Hidden among the poppies but witnessing the events, Deeti experiences a powerful emotive resonance between herself and Kalua. Deeti’s husband from her arranged marriage is handicapped and an opium addict. The combination means that he shows no sexual interest in her whatsoever. Having no clear memories of her wedding night as they are covered by an opium induced haze, she still slowly becomes convinced that her husband did not father her daughter – that in fact she was drugged and then raped by her brother-in-law with the collusion of her mother-in-law. As she watches from her hiding place, the trauma of her rape resonates with the humiliation to which Kalua is being subjected.

Ever since the night of her wedding, Deeti had been haunted by images of her own violation: now, watching from the shelter of the poppy field, she bit the edge of her palm to keep from crying out aloud. So it could happen to a man too? Even a powerful giant of a man could be humiliated and destroyed, in a way that far exceeded his body’s capacity for pain? (p. 53)

As the narrator shifts into narrated monologue we see something of the impact of Deeti’s recognition of her own violation in Kalua’s; and it is precisely the commonality marked by “too” that gives

expression to the reason for Deeti's powerful urge to cry out aloud. In what seems to be a variation, if not a near inversion, of the kind of recognition common in Renaissance romances, where knights "prove their personal, chivalric or spiritual identity by performing special feats" (Cave, 1988, p. 228), Kalua's human identity – his commonality with Deeti – is revealed to her through being subjected to an ordeal similarly traumatic to what she herself passed through. In this moment of shared trauma Kalua moves from being simply a member of a denigrated caste, that is, from being determined for Deeti by caste, to being an individual to whom Deeti has a common, emotional link.

The recognition is completed once Deeti has managed to thwart the landowners' plans for Kalua by secretly frightening their horses. She moves over to the unconscious Kalua to check that he is alive. Overcoming the internal resistance of the ingrained norms of caste, Deeti touches Kalua to check for a pulse. She finds one, and, ready to run at the first hint of a return to consciousness, takes a closer look:

She saw now that his size was deceptive, that he was quite young, with no more than a faint feathering of hair on his upper lip; lying crumpled in the sand, he was no longer the dark giant who called at her home twice a day, without speaking, or allowing himself to be seen: he was just a fallen boy. (2008, p. 54)

Through the emotive commonality of violation Kalua was first, to Deeti, powerfully ripped out of a general, caste-determined, background; here this move becomes more explicit to Deeti's consciousness. No longer is he a vague figure; he is now recognised as a fellow human being. The result is that Deeti proceeds to clean the horse dung off him, an act of care and generosity that is sharply contrasted with her usual avoidance of physical or eye contact, and then lays her hand upon his exposed groin. Soon, though, she realises what she is doing and recoils, returning to the shelter of the field to await Kalua's return to consciousness, to make certain "that he had been totally unconscious of her presence" (p. 54).

The opening created by this emotive, particular disruption of the norms of caste, the recognition of Kalua as a specific individual, is thus partially closed; but only partially since the moment continues in Deeti's memory, her mind "sharpening the details and refreshing certain particulars" (2008, p. 54).

Her act of helping and touching Kalua was also not without consequence; this recognition marks a crucial shift in the plot. Unbeknownst to Deeti, there is a mutual affective connection between the two of them, and later Kalua also acts against rules of caste by rescuing Deeti from her husband's funeral pyre and fleeing the community with her, thus setting the two of them on their trajectory towards the *Ibis*. Therefore, in a pattern that will be repeated in the novel, the recognition of Kalua's moral identity – his equal humanity with Deeti – results in the concealing of their nominal identities.

The dissidence in which Deeti and Kalua are involved is importantly characterised in the novel as liberatory. Once Deeti realises that she is still alive, we are told that she “did not feel herself to be living in the same sense as before: a curious feeling, of joy mixed with resignation, crept into her heart, for it was as if she really had died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life” (pp. 163-164). Deeti is free to pursue a life without an opium addicted husband and the continual proximity of her rapist. Despite this sense of rebirth, Deeti and Kalua's transgression of rules of caste and subsequent exile is difficult and painful. Most obviously, the fact that Deeti must leave her child behind is devastating. There is also a powerful sense of dislocation. When Deeti and Kalua join the barge of indentured servants, she needs to introduce herself, and gives her proper name: Aditi. This is initially a positive moment: “this is who she was – Aditi, a woman who had been granted, by a whim of the gods, the boon of living her life again” (p. 216). When it comes to specifying her caste, however, it is much more difficult. In needing to give a lower caste – Kalua's caste – she is “[c]onfronted with the prospect of cutting herself loose from her moorings in the world” (p. 217); her caste has always been “as intimate a part of herself as the memory of her daughter's face – but now it seemed as if that too were a part of a past life” (p. 217). It takes several tries for her to designate herself as a different caste. What we see here, then, is the inherent power of social categories to define Deeti's sense of self. Her breaking caste is a painful and dislocating experience, even as it gives her hope and rebirth.

Whereas Deeti and Kalua's freedom is clouded through their becoming indentured servants, the possibility of a new life is more obvious with Zachary, "the charismatic, curly-haired ... pale-skinned son of a black Baltimore 'freedwoman' and her former master" (Thompson, 2008). Having initially joined the crew of the *Ibis* as a carpenter, numerous misfortunes during the voyage result in his elevation through the ranks up to the level of first mate, and he finally arrives in Calcutta as the acting Captain of the ship. Importantly, Zachary is marked on the ship's manifest as "black". However, Baboo Nob Kissin Pander (another employee of Mr Burnham, Zachary's employer and an important figure for Ghosh's deployment of the thematic of religion, to which I will turn in a moment) causes this knowledge to be temporarily lost through recognising Zachary as a Guise of Krishna. About to enter the Captains' cabin to request the ship's manifest, Baboo Nob Kissin hears what he thinks to be a flute. Having "been filled with premonitory foreboding" (p. 133) that his spiritual awakening is at hand he reads the sound of the flute as a sign:

Was it really a flute, Lord Krishna's own instrument that had started to play...? It seemed impossible, but there could be no denying it – just as there was no denying that the tune... was set to Gurjari, one of the most favoured ragas for the singing of the Dark Lord's songs (p. 133)

In this moment of false reasoning, the method by which so many recognitions occur (Cave, 1988, p. 42), Baboo Nob Kissin concludes that whoever is playing the flute – Zachary – is a Guise of Krishna. We have here the recognition of a spiritual identity, although Baboo Nob Kissin begins to have some doubts when he sees that Zachary has pale skin: Krishna's name means 'black', and his "darkness had been celebrated in thousands of songs, poems and names" (Ghosh, p. 134). As with Deeti though, the recognition of a spiritual or moral identity leads to the displacement of a nominal one. It is Baboo Nob Kissin's confirmation of his spiritual recognition that obscures Zachary's race: when Baboo Nob Kissin reads on the ship's manifest that Zachary is categorised as "black," it was "with a sigh of quiet jubilation that he rested his eyes on the scribbled word that revealed the hand of the Dark Lord" (pp. 152-153). The manifest, and the knowledge of Zachary's racial categorisation, consequently vanishes into Baboo Nob Kissin's possession. The racism that Zachary would have suffered is thus averted,

opening up new possibilities: he goes on to become the official second mate of the *Ibis*; another liberatory breach of the divisions of society is achieved.

The lot of Neel Rattan Halder, “an erudite raja brought low by the racist injustices of British rule” (Thompson, 2008), and his friendship with Ah Fatt, focuses another bridging of cultural divisions. Although the liberatory aspect is as clouded as with Deeti due to Neel’s imprisonment, there is, nonetheless, a rupture with his moorings in life which is caught up in the figure of rebirth. The recognition of the rebirth in this case is not Neel’s own but that of Baboo Nob Kissin (p. 356), though the strong friendship between him and Ah Fatt, their refusal to “overmaster” each other (p. 353), in violation of the usual expectations of their captors, does give him something of a glimpse into the new life that Baboo Nob Kissin discerns. It is when we witness in Neel another instance of the strength of cultural determination, however, that we also see most clearly his new birth. Upon his imprisonment, Neel is faced for the first time with the prospect of eating food “prepared by hands of unknown caste” (p. 246). Although he had always professed that he did not believe in caste, and had laid claim to a “lineage of egalitarianism” that stretched through “Buddha, the Mahariva, Shri Chaitanya, Kabir” (p. 246), yet his body resists ingesting the food. Forcing himself to swallow it, he felt “as if he had ingested a handful of burning embers, for he could feel each grain blazing a trail of fire through his entrails,” yet he continued eating “until his very skin seemed to be peeling from his body” (p. 247). It is this physical trial of breaking caste that leads to his new life, although he does not expressly recognise it himself, considering his dreams to be “plagued”: “That night his dreams were plagued by a vision of himself, transformed into a moulting cobra, a snake that was struggling to free itself of its outworn skin” (p. 247).

Neel is slightly different to Zachary, Deeti and Kalua, as well as Paulette, however, in that there is no overt veiling of his nominal identity. What makes Paulette stand out, in her turn, is that her disguise is the most elaborate, and that she willingly breaks the norms of race and gender in sneaking onto the *Ibis* as an Indian indentured servant. In her case, as in Zachary’s, the benefit is obvious – the ability to

escape her restricted life; in her case as well there is the figure of rebirth which she herself provides. The veiling of nominal identities then, sometimes the result of the recognition of more spiritual ones, leads these variously oppressed or restricted characters through multiple breaches of societal division and onto the *Ibis*, the looming figure of their transformation. As Paulette and the other women approach the *Ibis* Paulette says to Deeti, "From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings – *jahazbhais* and *jahazbahens* – to each other. There'll be no differences between us" (p. 328). Deeti's response is important:

This answer was so daring, so ingenious, as to fairly rob the women of their breath. Not in a lifetime of thinking, Deeti knew, would she have stumbled upon an answer so complete, so satisfactory and so thrilling in its possibilities.... Yes, said Deeti, from now on, there are no differences between us; we are ... all of us children of the ship. (p. 328)

"No differences between us": here we have with their arrival at the *Ibis*, the beginning of the birth to which the breaches of societal divisions and norms were the labour pains. As one reviewer puts it, the *Ibis* "is the slave vessel that brings Zachary, the son of a slave, his status in a white world.... It is the jail that finally frees Neel. It is in the hold... that a Frenchwoman finds her true identity in an Indian disguise and that an oppressed Indian victim of rape is transformed into a woman of courage and leadership" (Schine, 2009).

This escape from the divisions of this world is an image that is repeated several times aboard the *Ibis*. Through the recognitions of the hidden identities, this image recurs, primarily the revelation of Zachary's identity. There are two people who recognise his identity, both of whom learn the fact through Baboo Nob Kissin. The first, and earlier in the narrative, is Paulette though she keeps her knowledge secret until her later conversation with Zachary. In the final sequences as she is disclosing her knowledge to him, which is for Zachary a double recognition (of Paulette as well as of her knowledge of him), Baboo Nob Kissin reveals Zachary's secret, accidentally this time, to Mr Crowle the first mate. These multiple recognitions in quick succession of each other, occurring shortly after the exposure of Deeti and Kalua's nominal identities, are the final revelations in the novel's climax, bringing matters to a head between Mr Crowle and Zachary – who now knows that Zachary is

categorised as “black” and intends to use the information to bend him to his will – as well as between Zachary and Paulette.

What is significant is the subversion of what Baboo Nob Kissin calls the “illusory differences of this world” (p. 461). Through the interplay of concealing and revealing identities, the recognition of moral or spiritual identities resulting in the concealment of nominal ones, numerous cultural divisions are bridged. The results are affective connections that defy societal norms: Deeti and Kalua get married; romance blossoms between Paulette and Zachary; a friendship flourishes between Zachary and Serang Ali, the head lascar on the *Ibis* who was also hiding his true identity; and Neel and Ah Fatt become strong friends, defying the expectations of their guards. Part of Paulette and Zachary’s conversation is salient with respect to this, building upon the conversation between the women noted above. The two of them are speaking in Zachary’s cabin, after his double recognition. Paulette offers the following insight:

‘What does it matter, Mr Reid?’ ... ‘Are not all appearances deceptive, in the end? Whatever there is within us – whether good, or bad, or neither – its existence will continue uninterrupted, will it not, no matter what the drape of our clothes, or the colour of our skin? What if it is the world that is a duperie, Mr Reid, and we the exceptions to its lies?’ (p. 459)

Interestingly Zachary does not agree at this point. As we have seen, the experiences of the individual characters have shown that it is precisely not the case that “whatever there is within us” continues “uninterrupted”. This is also confirmed through the organising metaphor of rebirth: the bridging of cultural divisions and categories has been a matter of transforming the characters’ sense of self. We might say, then, that the qualified version presented by the novel is the resistance to Paulette’s claim that the self can continue “uninterrupted”. And indeed, shortly after this Zachary comes to a similar, if slightly less idealistic, realisation in his encounter with Mr Crowle, when he is struck by the “delirium of the world” in which a single word, “black,” “could be invested with so much authority” (p. 465).

The freedom from cultural differences is repeated by Baboo Nob Kissin moments later as he rejoices in becoming “the key that could unlock the cages that imprisoned everyone, all these beings who

were ensnared by the illusory differences of this world” (p. 461). We see then that this understanding is continually reiterated while the characters are onboard ship. And while the bridging of cultural categories of difference is not as easy as Paulette seems to think, the main characters nevertheless have some measure of success in doing so. The relationships and possibilities that are birthed on the *Ibis* are aptly described by Zachary’s insight into his relationship with Serang Ali:

[H]e saw now that it was a rare, difficult and improbable thing for two people from worlds apart to find themselves linked by a tie of pure sympathy, a feeling that owed nothing to the rules and expectations of others. He understood also that when such a bond comes into being, its truths and falsehoods, its obligations and privileges, exist only for the people who are linked by it, and then in such a way that only they can judge the honour and dishonour of how they conduct themselves in relation to each other. (2008, p. 403)

We have here the adumbration of a fluid and contingent relation to the other person, not specified by the “rules and expectations of others” or the “illusory differences of the world,” but by the relationship itself. At the close of the novel we have seen a “slave ship bringing freedom to an unlikely group of people” (Schine, 2009), variously dispossessed and forming a transformed, undetermined group; each remains burdened, but also possesses the possibility of self-regeneration.

In her analysis of the novel, Hoydis argues that “the repeated emphasis on the *Ibis* as an equalitarian melting-pot and Ghosh’s use of the metaphor sometimes scratches the borders of the pathetic or the too obvious” (p. 334). Indeed it does seem at first that Ghosh is being rather heavy-handed in his treatment of the transformation of his characters. A more nuanced unfolding of characters’ passing through transformative experiences is achieved in *The Hungry Tide* (p. 334). I want to suggest, however, that this neglects a crucial element of the novel, and it is with regard to this that I briefly return to Ghosh’s handling of the question of religion. I noted above that when Ghosh addresses the question of religion, it is usually either in terms of syncretism or a critique of hypocrisy. The latter is certainly present in *Sea of Poppies*. When Burnham is speaking about the possibility of invading China in order to secure the continued openness of Chinese markets to opium, he says, “It will be for a

principle: for freedom – for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people. Free Trade is a right conferred on Man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade” (p. 106). The complicity of religion with colonialism is thus rendered quite explicit, and is consequently critiqued throughout the novel. An instance of this is Captain Chillingworth’s denunciation of the war: “The truth is, sir, that men do what their power permits them to do. We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this *pretence of virtue*, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by history” (p. 242, my emphasis). In addition to this, Hoydis argues that the *Ibis* itself is “a symbol of religious syncretism” because of the babble of prayers from numerous faiths that “resonates” throughout the ship when it enters the open seas (p. 332).

While I concur that *Sea of Poppies* continues Ghosh’s usual approach to religion, Hoydis passes over something crucial: the novel possesses something of a mythic character. Opened by Deeti’s vision of the *Ibis* and of Zachary aboard her, it closes with Zachary locking eyes with Deeti for the first time and recognising her. Alongside this symmetry there is, as Hoydis notes, “much greater authorial control” (p. 336) than in Ghosh’s other novels, which makes the often traumatic events that befall the characters seem “purposeful rather than as random coincidences” (p. 336). This picture of fate and visions is filled out further when we consider the character of Baboo Nob Kissin. Throughout the narrative, he is beginning to manifest his deceased female guru Taramony. This process comes to fruition on board the *Ibis*: “Now that Taramony’s presence was fully manifest in him, it was as if he had become the key that could unlock the cages that imprisoned everyone, all those beings who were ensnared by the illusory differences of this world” (Ghosh, p. 461). I have already noted that Baboo Nob Kissin’s declaration of the “illusory differences of this world” is one of the ethical points of the novel. What is particularly intriguing though is that Baboo Nob Kissin is crucial in bringing the characters together and in freeing those who were imprisoned. That is to say, he is indeed “the key”.

These features of the novel work to cast Ghosh's metaphorical heavy-handedness in a new light: it can be understood as part of this mythic quality of the narrative. The significance of this structuring of the novel, I suggest, is to add an additional layer to its ethical sense. A tale of transformation and of a common humanity that endures the differences of the world, it is told in a manner that resonates with religious discourse. That is to say, although the humanism that is conveyed is fairly proximate to the secular ideal, it is presented in a way that unsettles secular, modern discourse. In a fashion not dissimilar to what will be observed in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh renders the form of the novel somewhat "improper" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 121), imbuing it with a form of syncretism that, while congruent with Ghosh's earlier engagement with religion, also opens up fascinating possibilities for ways in which to negotiate the conflict between the affirmation and simultaneous critique of Enlightenment thought outlined in the previous chapter.

II

The Hungry Tide, as with *Sea of Poppies*, is concerned with the question of a common humanity. Crucially however, it includes two ethical concerns that are not present in *Sea of Poppies*. As Julia Hoydis (2011) rightly notes, what "noticeably distinguishes *The Hungry Tide* from Ghosh's other works" (p. 294) is the concern with the clash between human interests and nature, and as such it poses a question "most often sidelined in conservation drives" (Anand, 2008, p. 35), namely the impact on the local people. At the core of Ghosh's exploration of this dilemma are the events of the 1979 Morichjhāpi massacre.

The Sundarbans, where Morichjhāpi is located, is a vast archipelago of mangrove forests, covering "an area of 10,000 square kilometres, sprawling across India and Bangladesh" (Anand, 2008, p. 25). Nirmal, one of the central characters of the novel, describes it as "interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal... [t]he islands are the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *āchol* that follows her, half-wetted by the sea" (p. 6). It is a place of continuously shifting geography, the countless channels and rivers in their meeting and parting giving evanescent shape to

thousands of islands, submerging nearly all of them at every high tide; “some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago” (p. 7). The Indian part of the region is home to about 245 tigers and seven million people, and was declared a tiger reserve in 1973, becoming a national park in 1984 (Anand, 2008, p. 25). It is an area of extreme poverty; as Upamanyu Mukherjee (2010) puts it, the “*Sundarbans* of majestic tigers and mysterious forests,” exists alongside the “*Sundarbans* of unremitting poverty, human and non-human immiseration, government neglect and oppression” (p. 108).

In 1978 around thirty thousand low-caste refugees from Bangladesh had settled on Morichjhāpi (Anand, 2008; Mukherjee, 2010). Although it was the rhetoric of the Communist Party of India (CPI[M]) that had encouraged the refugees to settle there (Anand, 2008, p. 31), upon ascending to power in 1978 the CPI(M) effected a “fast and vicious reversal of its line on the refugees,” demanding that they evacuate from the region (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 110). The official reason for the demand was that Morichjhāpi was a part of the protected forest and tiger reserve, which the settlers were violating. That this alleged environmental concern merely served as an alibi can be seen in that the “Island of Morichjhāpi was part of the Sundarbans Forest Reserve, but the mangrove vegetation was cleared in 1975 by the Congress government to make way for the revenue-generating coconut and tamarisk plantations. The island was also not part of the core area of the tiger reserve” (Anand, 2008, p. 31). Nevertheless, in early 1979 the government instituted a blockade of the island in an attempt to starve the settlers out. On 14 May 1979, when the settlers still refused to leave, the government ordered the police force, together with hired thugs, to forcefully remove them (Anand, p. 32; Mukherjee, p. 111). Over the next two days, this force “moved in on Marichjhapi, systematically raping, killing and burning houses” (Mukherjee, p. 111). Due to unreliable data and the lack of an official inquiry it is impossible to know how many people were killed; estimates range from five to fifteen thousand (Mukherjee, p. 111; Anand, p. 33).

It must be noted that while the government's motives for ordering the evacuation of Morichjhāpi are suspect, within the novel there is no direct reference to this. Rather, the novel is constructed in such a way so as to present the massacre as the confluence of environmental protection initiatives and the deadly fight for survival between humans and tigers hosted within the Sundarbans. The novel tells the story of Piya Roy, an American cetologist of Bengali descent, and Kanai Dutt, an Indian middle-class translator and businessman from Delhi, as they journey into the Sundarbans and their separate lives intertwine. Piya is in search of an endangered species of river dolphin, the *Orcaella brevirostris* or the Irrawaddy dolphin, while Kanai is en route to visit his aunt Nilima who lives on the (fictional) island of Lusibari in order to read through some papers left for him by his late uncle Nirmal. That Piya is a conservationist begins to bring this conflict between human and non-human to the fore; that the papers left for Kanai, which form a substantial sub-narrative to his own, is Nirmal's diary of the events leading up to the night before the massacre makes it explicit (Anand, p. 24). The two sides to this conflict are thus formally constitutive of the novel. Thematically, we learn from Piya that the dolphins are suffering a "dramatic deterioration" of their habitat (p. 266), and we witness the killing of a tiger by the inhabitants of one of the villages in the area as it preys on their livestock. Additionally, Nirmal writes in his diary,

I remembered how when I first came to Lusibari, the sky would be darkened by birds at sunset. Many years had passed since I'd seen such flights of birds. When I first noticed their absence, I thought they would soon come back but they had not. I remembered a time when at low tide the mudbanks would turn scarlet with millions of swarming crabs. That colour began to fade long ago and now it is never seen any more. Where had they gone, I wondered, those millions of swarming crabs, those birds?

Age teaches you to recognize the signs of death. (2005, p. 215)

The Sundarbans are in an ecological crisis, and the novel gives vivid representation to both the plight of the humans and the non-humans. As Anand astutely notes, the idea of hunger in the title signals the locus of this conflict: "Whose hunger is to be privileged? The hunger of the poor, who are struggling to eke out a living... or the tiger, losing its habitat, threatened by poaching and on the verge of extinction?" (p. 35).

With the massacre as central to the novel, *The Hungry Tide* raises, for the first time in this thesis, the question of the ethics of remembering historical trauma and violence. As with *Sea of Poppies*, the main thrust of this ethical concern, as Terri Tomsy (2009) suggests, is “to recuperate suppressed subaltern histories and to advance their calls for social justice” (p. 54). After having occurred, the incident slipped below the horizon: there was very limited coverage of the tragedy, the Prime Minister of the time failed to pursue the matter, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission, “responsible for ensuring the well being of the lower castes” concluded that “there were no human rights violations or atrocities committed in Morichjhāpi even though their file contained newspaper clippings, petitions and names and ages of 236 men, women, and children killed by the police at Marichjhapi prior to the massacre” (Anand, 2008, p. 33). The novel can therefore quite rightly be seen as remembering neglected stories, of “writing historically about pasts that could not have been articulated through historical discourse in the first place” (Mondal, 2007, p. 162). However, this work of remembering extends beyond the recollection of the incident itself to a negotiation with the validity of a different understanding of and epistemic approach to the world, which is crucial to the transformation of the elite characters in the novel. I will spend some time on these transformations, focusing particularly on Kanai and Nirmal, which will, in turn, return us to the recognition of a common humanity and the tragic conflict of values seen in the tension between the human and the non-human.

The importance of transformation to the ethical sense of this novel is implied in the description of the Sundarbans, which is itself in a constant state of flux, of transformation: “There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea” (p. 7); borders in the Sundarbans are transient, the islands shifting their shape and size according to the water’s flow. And it is not only between land and water, salt water and fresh, that the borders are porous and shifting. The tide country is simultaneously a place of despair and of hope; the rankings of caste or religious demarcations are nearly nonexistent; and the myth of Bon Bibi, which articulates the area’s fear and hope, is a hybrid result of the confluence of various languages and belief systems. This rural, poverty-stricken place is,

in fact, remarkably cosmopolitan (Johansen, 2008), and this hybrid, fluid nature of the tide country serves as the image for this central concern; as Saswat Das aptly puts it, the “river... respects no boundaries or culture, washing ashore myriad possibilities only to dissolve them in its abysmal depth” (Das, 2006, p. 181).

A further reinforcement of this theme of transformation can be seen through Hoydis’ analysis of Nirmal’s citations of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*. Hoydis argues that the tension between despair and hope, that I suggest is mythologized in the legend of Bon Bibi, is also reflected in the poems which “comprise the novel’s main themes in a nutshell” (Hoydis, p. 309). Of particular importance is when Nirmal’s reading of Rilke coincides with the fluctuating nature of the Sundarbans. Recounting a journey with Kusum, Fokir and Horen to the island of Garjontola in order to visit a shrine to Bon Bibi, Nirmal begins to realise the discursive richness of the jungle. Rather than being “an emptiness, a place where time stood still,” it is in fact the opposite:

What was happening here, I realized, was that the wheel of time was spinning too fast to be seen. In other places it took decades, even centuries, for a river to change course; it took an epoch for an island to disappear. But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray from week to week, and islands are unmade in days.... It is as if the whole tide country were speaking in the voice of the poet: ‘life is lived in transformation’. (pp. 224,225)

This continuous transformation, as Hoydis phrases it, “becomes Nirmal’s credo” (p. 309). It also extends beyond Nirmal’s private reflections as each of the privileged characters in the novel undergoes transformation. Crucial for this, and more significant than Rilke’s poetry, is that they “encounter a series of heterogeneous cultural texts – songs, folk tales, oral histories and, most crucially, *Jatra* [a hybrid form of folk theatre]” (Mukherjee, p. 122); it is, in part, through encountering “challenging counter-narratives” that their transformation is achieved (p. 122). It is also, as Tomsy argues, through powerful emotional responses.

Mukherjee and Tomsy both consider the (connected) transformations of Nirmal and Kanai. For Mukherjee, Nirmal’s transformation consists in learning “to imagine himself through the eyes of others – human and non-human” (Mukherjee, p. 123). His conversations with Horen play an

important part in accomplishing this. In reading to him about European adventures in Bengal, “Nirmal assumes he is enlightening the illiterate Horen about the ebbs and flows of history as they are charted by the canonical knowledge contained in a European text” (p. 122). Horen, however, continuously interrupts Nirmal’s reading with his own accounts of the same territory described in the book. Over time, Nirmal’s position shifts to the realisation that “he can learn more from people like Horen and Kusum than from liberal imperialists” (p. 122), a shift that is later confirmed a few days before the blockade of Morichjhāpi. During a journey with Kusum, Horen and Fokir to visit the shrine on Garjontola, he listens to Horen pray to Bon Bibi at the shrine and is amazed at “hearing these Arabic invocations” (Ghosh, p. 246); his amazement deepens when he is given a pamphlet from which the prayer is taken: “the pages opened to the right, as in Arabic, not to the left, as in Bangla. Yet the prosody was that of much of Bangla folklore” (p. 247). What seems to be crucial for Mukherjee in this moment is Nirmal’s admission that he was absolutely “taken” (p. 248) by his recognition of the complex hybridity of the Bon Bibi myth (Mukherjee, p. 123). As such, it marks and confirms a crucial shift in Nirmal’s way of thinking.

While this seems to be correct, it is important to supplement it with Tomsy’s observations. Of interest to her is the emotional aspect of Nirmal’s involvement with Morichjhāpi. Nirmal’s intellectual recognition is crucial, but there is an important emotional corollary to it: Kusum. Nirmal describes her as his “muse,” rivalling his desire for his life with his wife: “I felt myself torn between my wife and the woman who had become the muse I’d never had; between the quiet persistence of everyday change and the heady excitement of revolution – between prose and poetry” (p. 216). Nirmal is a poet and idealistic socialist, making his choice to identify with the refugees not entirely surprising. What Tomsy notes is the role of Nirmal’s emotions for this: “One might ask whether the cause of Morichjhāpi would energize Nirmal in the same way if he were not nostalgically attached to the idea of revolutions, or infatuated with Kusum” (Tomsy, p. 59). While she agrees the novel establishes as important that “one’s own sedimented norms are... perceived and then overturned” (p. 59), this is tightly knit with and enabled by his “complex affective experiences that arise from [Kusum’s]

proximity and his exposure to the galvanizing atmosphere and energies of Morichjhāpi's community" (p. 59).¹⁸

Through Nirmal's notebook being passed on to Kanai, it is he "who most explicitly assumes the burden of Nirmal's experience" (Mukherjee, p. 123). While Kanai is reading the notebook, we are told that he recollects seeing in his childhood a *Jatra* performance of the same Bon Bibi myth that Nirmal heard and read. The Nirmal of Kanai's childhood memory is very different from the Nirmal of the notebook, as he denigrates the story as telling of "imaginary miracles of gods and saints" which diverts the locals' attention from "the true wonders of the reality surrounding them" (Ghosh, p. 102). For the young Kanai, however, the experience of the *Jatra* is a riveting, emotional experience that is marked by the same realisation of hybridity and complexity as Nirmal's later one (pp. 102-103). Although we can surmise that the performance had a minimal lasting impact on Kanai when he first saw it, Mukherjee suggests that the recollection sparked by Nirmal's notebook has a transforming effect: "Like Nirmal, these memories of a multicultural, polyglot *Jatra* lead Kanai to accept that the culture of the *Sundarbans*, like its geography, is composed of diverse worldly currents that dispute the contemporary Euro-centric notions of modernity and globalization" (Mukherjee, p. 124).

The difficulty with Mukherjee's argument here is that at this moment of recollection Kanai remains largely unchanged. He has only just begun reading his uncle's notebook, and the recollection is presumably sparked by Nirmal's plea for him to read the account: "If not for my sake, then for [Kusum's], read on" (Ghosh, p. 69). Later, when Piya and Fokir arrive in Lusibari, we witness the continued presence of his perceived (metropolitan) superiority to (the rural) Fokir in the condescending manner in which he addresses him: "it was the kind of tone in which someone might address a dim-witted waiter, at once jocular and hectoring" (p. 210). Rather than being transformed through his recollection of the *Jatra*, it seems more likely that the memory is caught up in the powerful effect of Nirmal's account of his own transformation; it is shortly after this revealing

¹⁸ See also Hoydis (2011, pp. 313-319).

meeting with Fokir that Kanai reads Nirmal's account of his wonder at the Bon Bibi story. As Tomsy argues, the notebook has a transforming, interrupting effect on Kanai since it "carries within it an affective surplus that leaves its distinctive imprint on Kanai, as it communicates a traumatic history" (Ghosh, p. 60).

The importance of both the intellectual and emotional impact of the diary on Kanai becomes clearer shortly after he has completed reading it. As Tomsy points out, that Kanai's "hands were shaking" (Ghosh, p. 278) when he finished reading reveals the emotional impact of the diary upon him. And it is only after finishing it that Kanai's moment of recognition occurs, when Fokir takes Kanai to Garjontola, the same island of Nirmal's own epiphany. Whereas Nirmal's experience of the island was peaceful – though laced with fear of encountering a tiger – Kanai's is rather more dramatic. Mukherjee describes the situation succinctly when he notes, "For Fokir, the island holds no fear for those who are pure at heart, but the impure are sure to be punished by the servant of the forest deity – the tiger" (p. 128). When Kanai becomes enraged at Fokir he is revealed as holding within himself what was implied in his condescending tone toward Fokir noted above: "the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism towards the village" (Ghosh, p. 326). As such, the island becomes the scene of his judgement and self-recognition:

In Kanai's professional life there had been a few instances in which the act of interpreting had given him the momentary sensation of being transported out of his body and into another.... it was exactly this feeling that came upon him as he looked at Fokir: it was as though his own vision were being refracted through those opaque, unreadable eyes and he were [sic] seeing not himself... but a great host of people – a double for the outside world, someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother; he had become a token for a vision of human beings in which men such as Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was less than that of an animal.... Fokir had brought him here not because he wanted him to die, but because he wanted him to be judged. (p. 327)

This is a crucial moment, and one that I will return to a bit further on. What is important to note here is that Kanai recognises himself as complicit with the "vision of human beings" that enabled the Morichjhāpi massacre to occur; he recognises his complicity with the injustice, and has it forcefully driven home by feeling himself to be judged. And indeed, in his terror, in a "flood of pure sensation" (p. 328), he sees the custodian of judgement, a tiger.

Mukherjee argues convincingly that this scene (among others) bears some formal characteristics of *Jatra*, namely “heightened emotive language, mythic morality and judgement, the forest goddess and the tiger” (p. 128). Their effect is to render the form of the novel “improper” (p. 121), producing in the readers an effect similar to seeing a *Jatra* “first-hand” (p. 124) – indeed, it is almost as if Kanai has in this scene entered the story of Bon Bibi. As a result of the “formal mixture of psychological realism... and the highly melodramatic and theatrical,” there is a “shifting of the privileged normative cosmopolitan or metropolitan point of view in the novel to that of the local or provincial” (p. 129), a shift that needs to be negotiated by the reader for whom the possibility is thus opened up to learn the “same lesson” (p. 129) as Kanai, namely, “Learning to see oneself with other eyes, eyes that belong to the lost and the broken” (p. 128).

While Kanai’s lesson is important, before discussing it I want to stress the aspect of this scene that Mukherjee notes is psychological realism. For what makes this moment interesting, and emphasises the emotive aspect of Kanai’s feeling of being judged, is that this is not his first realisation of complicity. In the time between reading Nirmal’s notebook and this recognition scene, Piya and Kanai witness a village killing a tiger. In the resulting debate, Kanai argues that he and Piya are complicit in enforcing wildlife protection that has no thought or regard for the large number of human lives taken by tigers and affected by the conservation: “It’s not hard to ignore the people who’re dying – after all, they are the poorest of the poor” (p. 301). Kanai can thus be seen to already possess a certain amount of self-recognition as the result of reading Nirmal’s diary. On Garjontola, however, it emerges that this is only the first step to his more powerful, emotionally dramatic recognition which includes his complicity in the more heinous offense of the Morichjhāpi incident, and is focused not on a general category of “the poorest of the poor,” but on the specific person of Fokir.

The importance of Fokir for Kanai’s *anagnorisis* brings us to the ethical theme that underpins all of the transformations in the novel. As many critics have noted,¹⁹ *The Hungry Tide* presents a form of

¹⁹ See for instance Hoydis (2011), Rollason (2011), Huggan& Tiffin (2007), and Hawley (2005).

humanism, a common humanity, that enables the bridging of differences between people as the transformation of Nirmal and Kanai illustrate. An important scene where this becomes overtly thematised occurs early in the novel. As a result of the misfortunes that mark Piya's first days in the region, she finds herself sharing a small boat with a local fisherman and his son, Fokir and Tutul. Neither of them can speak any English, the only language that Piya knows, making verbal communication impossible. They nevertheless manage to strike up a form of communication through gestures. There are two moments of importance. The first is shortly after Fokir has rescued Piya from the river. As the launch with the corrupt forest guard, from which she fell into the river, begins to disappear, the shock from her experience sets in and suddenly she is shaking hard enough to rock the small boat.

There was a touch on her shoulder and she turned sideways to see the child [Tutul], standing beside her. He put his arm around her and clung to her back, hugging her, trying to warm her body with his own. She closed her eyes and did not open them again until the chattering of her teeth had stopped. (p. 63)

Tutul's gesture of warmth and assistance is remarkable, cutting across any barrier or hesitation that might be expected between strangers. The child's unconditional acceptance is distinct from Fokir's, and we are quickly made aware that it is Tutul's presence that helps Piya to trust Fokir; she describes him as her "protector" (p. 64). It is not long though before this changes, a crucial moment for which is Piya's realisation of Fokir's own recognition of their fellow humanity. Fokir creates a small enclosure on his canoe for Piya to change in, and she finds the gesture particularly moving:

It was not just that he had thought to create a space for her; it was as if he had chosen to include her in some simple, practised family ritual, found a way to let her know that despite the inescapable muteness of their exchanges, she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner. But where had this recognition come from? He had probably never met anyone like her before, any more than she had ever met anyone like him. (p. 71)

Hoydis argues that Fokir's concern for Piya here expresses "a 'humanism of the other' in Levinas' sense" (p. 314), primarily because it "seems to precede comprehension" (p. 314). I am not convinced that we can designate this moment as Levinasian, however, since although Fokir's action precedes *familiarity*, it does not precede comprehension: from the moment that he engaged with Piya and the

forest guard their relation would have been comprehended in terms of power relations, class and linguistic distinctions, precisely those barriers that are overcome through characters' transformations. A Levinasian understanding locates the ethical relation of the face-to-face as preceding – but not chronologically prior to – this determination of their interactions, and present only as a trace. Nevertheless, although this passage is not strictly a Levinasian moment as Hoydis thinks, she is right in noting the acknowledgement of Piya's singular personhood; Fokir's recognition here is remarkable precisely because he consciously relates to Piya as a fellow person, resisting the determinations which the contours of Piya's surprise – “not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner” – shows that she is aware.

It is important to note that this recognition of a common humanity is not, as has sometimes been suggested²⁰, simply straightforward and uncomplicated. Hawley argues that *The Hungry Tide* reveals the “transient nature of the division between individuals” (2005, p. 132). However, the ease that is implied here is misleading. As in *Sea of Poppies* the “illusory differences of this world” (Ghosh, 2008, p. 461) are not painlessly discarded or overcome. What is required to bridge the “division between individuals” is a frequently painful change – on the part of the metropolitan elites (Mukherjee, p. 117). Thus Kanai dramatically and somewhat traumatically moves from viewing Fokir as a hindrance to his wife and son as they seek to advance in the world (p. 134), to his recognition noted above which ultimately leads him to restructure his business so that he can move to Kolkata to write Nirmal's story. There are also two moments of recognition, however, that complicate the idea of a common humanity as such.

The first of these occurs between Kanai and Kusum, the first time they meet. It is during a gathering of the women of Lusibari and one woman is recounting a story of brutal violence suffered at the hands of a father-in-law and his family. Kanai is eavesdropping, and remains undetected except by Kusum:

²⁰ See Hoydis's discussion of Rollason (2011).

Kanai and Kusum held each other's gaze, and for the duration of that moment it was as though they were staring across the most primeval divide in creation... it seemed scarcely imaginable that here, in the gap that separated them, lay the potential for these extremes of emotion, this violence. (p. 91)

The context of gender violence in which this occurs suggests that "the gap" is, in one sense, the difference of gender. While the violence that results from the distance between individuals has definite gendered dimensions, I want to suggest that what is recognised here is something more fundamental – namely, the ultimately unbridgeable dissonance between selves that leads Levinas to describe the relation to another self as a relation to infinity. In Kanai and Kusum's case the "mystery" of "the gap that separated them" (p. 91) awakens their curiosity. Yet there is a recognition that it is the ultimately unbreakable silence between selves which can give rise to "these extremes of emotion, this violence"; there is always the possibility for the spaces between individuals to be bridged by violence rather than by recognition and compassion. Confirmation of this can be seen when Piya concludes that her mute relation to Fokir is, in its silence, more honest.

In contrast [to the way that for dolphins "to 'see' was also to 'speak'," "to exist was to communicate"], there was the immeasurable distance that separated her from Fokir. What was he thinking about as he stared at the moonlit river? Whatever it was, she would never know: not just because they had no language in common but because that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out. ... and wasn't it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? ...speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being. (p. 159)

Speech cannot break this epistemic silence between people, cannot successfully bridge the gap; it can only give the illusion of doing so. Of course, it is not quite as illusory as Piya's thoughts make it out to be. She and Fokir do manage to communicate, and indeed experience real intimacy, one vivid moment of which is when he is fishing and she is sounding the river bed (p. 141). Nevertheless, while throughout the novel there is the experienced necessity of recognising an individual as specific, and the related need to bridge the gap between persons with transforming recognitions and compassion, there is a simultaneous recognition of the limits of knowledge between other people, of the impossibility of ever truly grasping another self, and the consequent possibility of violence that ultimately haunts each relation. The novel thus does not represent a naïve move towards a more

humanistic understanding of relating to another person; there is the awareness that this relation can be undone by the very same gap that makes it necessary.

These recognitions and transformations that I have detailed are closely connected to the Morichjhāpi incident, and are thus central to the novel's framing ethical theme of conflict between the human and the non-human. I argued above that the novel establishes a clear conflict, despite the duplicity of the government in citing environmental protection as their reason for clearing Morichjhāpi. A number of critics, in addition to Anand who I discussed above, have commented on this tension. The most prominent are Anshuman Mondal (2007) and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2007; 2010). For both readings of the novel, there is a distinct lack of a resolution to the conflict that is so vividly evoked.²¹ Both also consider a crucial moment of the conflict between human and non-human, which will provide a good place to begin.

Piya, Kanai, Horen and Fokir are together on the river when they learn of a commotion in a nearby village. A tiger has entered the village and clawed its way through the roof of the hut that is the livestock pen in order to feed on a newly born calf. The villagers realise that now, "for the few minutes it was in the pen, it was vulnerable, because to make its escape it would have to leap vertically through the hole in the roof. Even for a tiger, this would not be a simple feat, not with a calf in its jaws" (p. 292). This tiger has killed two people from the village and has been successfully preying on the villagers' livestock for a long time. Seizing their opportunity, the villagers trap the tiger in the hut with nets and begin to stab into its interior with sharpened staves, trying to kill the tiger. It is not long before someone sets the pen alight, proceeding to burn the tiger alive. As Huggan and Tiffin comment, this is "a traumatic scene of death and torture that the reader is forced to witness through Piya's horrified eyes" (2007, p. 5). However, this is not an unbalanced portrayal, weighting the novel in favour of the tiger. The vividness of this violence against the tiger is matched when Kusum recounts to a young Kanai that she witnessed her father's death by a tiger. Although she shut her eyes, she still

²¹ For examples of other critics who likewise consider the conflict largely unresolved, see Anand (2008) and Hoydis (2011).

heard everything: “the roar that froze her father; she heard his cry for help – *bachao!* She heard the sound of his bones cracking as the animal swiped a paw across his neck; she heard the rustle of the mangrove as the animal dragged the corpse into the forest” (p. 109). Thus when it is reported that two people from the village have been killed by the tiger, Kusum’s trauma is recollected. What we have in this scene of the tiger killing, then, is a representative moment of the clash between the human and non-human.

For Huggan and Tiffin, Piya’s horror at the brutal killing of the tiger and subsequent attempted intervention is “based, it is suggested, on a sentimentality that fails to take into consideration the large number of people whose lives have been taken by tigers in the past” (2007, p. 5). They therefore conclude that for Ghosh, “People... must necessarily take precedence over animals” (p. 5). While I will argue that Huggan and Tiffin are, to a certain extent, correct, it is important to note that it is not this scene that suggests such a reading. Mondal is surely right to assert that Ghosh at this point actually sharpens the conflict (Mondal, 2007, pp. 177-178). For while Kanai does say that Piya fails to understand what is transpiring, the two of them debate the topic again the next day. It is an interesting moment, where the two narrative threads that I noted above – Piya expressing the conservationist perspective and Kanai, through Nirmal, the villagers’ – enter into explicit dialogue. In the debate Kanai reiterates his argument that Piya does not appreciate that the tiger killed by the villagers had been preying on them and their livestock. Piya’s retort that “everywhere in the world dozens of people are killed every day – on roads, in cars, in traffic” (p. 301) is countered by Kanai’s confession of complicity noted above in discussing his recognition: there are so many deaths because conservation efforts are pushed through without thought for the human costs. Interestingly, Piya’s own retort is to assert that the importance of conservation is fundamentally connected to humanity’s well being, especially those who Kanai is concerned about:

Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What’ll be left then? Aren’t we alone enough in the universe? And do you think it’ll stop at that? Once we decide we can kill off other species, it’ll be people next – just the kind of people you’re thinking of, people who’re poor and unnoticed. (Ghosh, 2005, p. 301)

The debate ends soon after this, seemingly with no final conclusion being reached, though Piya does have the final word.

For Mondal, this inconclusiveness shows that the “the novel does not offer a resolution; its position is ambivalent, but this lack of resolution is precisely what opens up the ethical debate” (p. 178). It is, he argues, precisely because Ghosh does not wish to subsume the ethical under the political, under the need for decisive action, that he leaves the debate open (p. 173), and this ambivalence is “the register of an ethics that recognises the inescapable duality and impossible paradox of the post-colonial predicament” (p. 174). Mondal here outlines an understanding of ethics that is quite close to what I argued for in the introduction, primarily in the need to navigate the inescapable ethical tragedy that characterises the postcolonial situation. I think it is important though to qualify Mondal’s reading. Firstly, his argument for the ambivalence that he locates seems to imply that this clash is *fundamentally* irresolvable, that is, that it is a logical paradox, a case of “either or,” both sides of which Ghosh affirms. However, it is in Huggan and Tiffin’s criticism of *The Hungry Tide* that reason for rejecting this assessment can be found. Secondly, I think it is inaccurate to characterise the novel as providing no resolution.

I noted that for Huggan and Tiffin, Ghosh seems to prioritise human over animal life. Nevertheless their assessment is in one respect similar to Mondal’s. They find that the difficult question of the clash between the human and non-human is never directly addressed; ultimately “neither a practical nor philosophical management of the problem [of the clash] is offered” (2007, p. 5). Rather, it is avoided. In making Piya’s work the conservation of the river dolphin, “the real clash of interests is peculiarly – and perhaps deliberately – displaced” (2007, p. 5)²²: there is no difficulty with dolphin conservation because dolphins do not prey upon people. Huggan and Tiffin go on, interestingly, to make an argument very similar to Piya’s cited above. Ghosh’s privileging of the human over the animal repeats the ideology that authorises the killing of non-human others and, by categorising them

²² Huggan and Tiffin’s argument is reiterated in their more recent book. See Huggan & Tiffin (2010).

as animalistic, the killing of other humans. This is, they argue, a fundamental part of the ideology of Imperialism: "In assuming human ethical and material priorities over those of other animals, we continue to repeat the ideology of imperialism, condemning ourselves to Ghosh's perpetual impasse of tiger versus human" (2007, p. 6). The problem with this argument is that the "impasse of tiger versus human" exists precisely because the traditional privileging of human over animal interests has been removed. If human interests trumped those of the tigers, there would be no impasse. Thus in agreement with Mondal, I suggest that *The Hungry Tide* holds human and tiger interests in tension with each other, not prioritising one over the other, as Piya's last word in the debate suggests. But this is not a fundamental paradox; the two values are only contingently incommensurable. And it is in making this clearer that Piya's concern with the dolphins, rather than displacing the issue, is absolutely crucial to it.

What Piya's conservation of the Irrawaddy dolphin shows us is that it is possible for conservation and the interests of local people to coincide. We see this not only in Huggan and Tiffin's point that dolphins do not eat people, but also in the detrimental effect new fishing methods are having on the ability of the villagers in the Sundarbans to feed themselves. At one point, Kanai is talking to Moyna, Fokir's wife, when she mentions that Fokir's way of life is not sustainable because "in fifteen years the fish will be gone" as a result of "new nylon nets, which they use to catch... the spawn of tiger prawns. The nets are so fine that they catch the eggs of all the other fish as well" (p. 134). It is safe to assume that the destruction such fishing wrecks on the natural habitat of the dolphins would be of concern to Piya, and as such that it serves as a common point of interest for conservationists and locals. Rather than sidestepping the issue, Piya's conservation works to reinforce the simultaneous affirmation of the value both of the human and the nonhuman in a way that asserts two *contingently* conflicting values, rather than a fundamental paradox. And as such, the "practical" way forward that Huggan and Tiffin discern in the novel – namely "no conservation without local consultation and participation" (2007, p. 5) – gains more validity than they ascribe to it.

In bringing this analysis to a close it is important to return to my comment above that Huggan and Tiffin are to a certain extent correct in arguing that Ghosh privileges the human over the animal. As I elaborated in my introduction, moments of incommensurability demand a decision; and a decision that is thoroughly condemned by the novel is the one which precipitated the Morichjhāpi massacre. It is significant in this regard that Kanai's powerful recognition discussed above occurs not only in relation to Fokir, but to Morichjhāpi. As we saw, Kanai in that moment realised himself as complicit with a "vision of human beings in which men such as Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was *less* than that of an animal" (p. 327, my emphasis). This judgement is not a matter of valuing humans as intrinsically higher than animals, but of valuing them less; of viewing "men such as Fokir" – the poor and disposed – as easily expendable. For it seems to me that the challenge in undoing the hierarchy of value between human and non human, as I have argued Ghosh does, is not to invert the hierarchy, an inversion that would make the already marginal even more vulnerable. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the novel, in its judgement of Kanai, judges the privileging of the tiger over the human *in this particular* conflict that was Morichjhāpi. Thus while the novel is in one sense ambivalent as it upholds both of the conflicting values, it is also insistent upon the action that should have been taken in the concrete situation which it considers.

III

In both of these novels we have seen the importance in Ghosh's writing of moments of transformation, where characters bridge the differences – racial, cultural, or linguistic – that separate them. We have also seen that these connections and transformations are grounded in a common humanity. Explicitly presented in *Sea of Poppies*, such an understanding of humanity is also at work in *The Hungry Tide*. While in both cases Ghosh's humanism is qualified by the constitutive effect of cultural categories to our sense of self, it is in *The Hungry Tide* that the idea is presented that bridging differences holds within it its possible undoing. At this moment Ghosh becomes almost Derridean in his representation of the fundamental silence between individuals as the condition of (im)possibility

for connecting across difference. This is, we might say, the radical evil of the human condition: the ineradicable possibility that the silence between individuals will be bridged by violence. Nevertheless, Ghosh seems to follow several prominent theorists, such as Hallward and Appiah, in asserting the importance of maintaining a form of humanism while simultaneously showing its limits and undermining it.

In making this argument, I have shown that in *Sea of Poppies* the possibilities of recognition are both thematically and formally deployed, the interplay of recognitions reinforcing the ethical sense of an enduring, common humanity. Repeatedly, the recognition of spiritual or moral identities that transcend the cultural differentiations on which nominal identities are based results in the temporary elision of those nominal identities. This in turn further enables a transgression of social boundaries, allowing and fostering affective connections which, in the climactic concatenation of recognitions, is seen as the main ethical thrust of the novel: the recognition of the illusory differences of the world. In all of this, *anagnorisis* is central. Although not thematically deployed in the same way in *The Hungry Tide*, recognition retains its importance in this novel as well. The individual transformations are moments of recognition, all of which pivot, I suggest, around Kanai's dramatic recognition on Garjontola. They are, additionally, dependent upon emotional responses in a way that was only visible in *Sea of Poppies* in Deeti's recognition of Kalua's equal humanity. It was Kanai's dramatic recognition, however, and the results of Piya's own transformation, that enabled a recalibration of the central ethical clash between the human and the non-human in the terms of a tragic (contingent) conflict of values.

These two novels have provided an initial crystallising of what it would mean to read the ethical sense of the novel in the terms for which I have argued, presenting good examples of both the importance of *anagnorisis* – and of the emotions for this – and the tragic conflict of values. They directly address the ethical question of humanism, and I have also noted their lesser engagement with questions of religion and remembrance. Actively recuperating forgotten and marginal histories, Ghosh's challenge

to history can be seen as an ethically motivated work of the recovery of stories that are either politically suppressed or would otherwise fall beyond the pale of traditional historiography. He presents an ethical challenge to historiography by “humanising” it, and resisting, to some extent, its drive for “complete, accurate historical representation” (Hoydis, 2011, p. 58). The ethics of representing past trauma in narrative, however, is less of a pressing concern: when the past is particularly traumatic and violent, what is the relationship between the obligations of memory and the creative freedom of art? In the work of the young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, who has dramatised scenes of civil and domestic conflict in her two novels and short story collection (to date), this question is of pressing importance. She also substantially introduces for the first time in the thesis the ethical theme of religion, and I turn now to consider her work.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGION AND THE ETHICS OF REMEMBRANCE: CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE

I

Chimamanda Adichie belongs to a new generation of authors emerging from Nigeria, often dubbed the “third generation”, and her two novels on which I will be focusing – *Purple Hibiscus* (2005) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007a) – are correspondingly set in Nigeria. Shifting the focus of my analysis to Adichie allows me to retexture or more finely nuance my argument that the tragedy of colonial enlightenment is a complex ethical legacy with which the postcolonial novel often grapples. Adichie’s novels draw out a further aspect of this complexity through bringing into view an important ethical concern with which Ghosh does not engage. As a professing Catholic, Adichie has an interest in religion, particularly Catholicism, as a viable ethical framework in contemporary Nigeria. Christianity, as I will discuss below, came to southern Nigeria as a result of intensive missionary work in conjunction with colonialism. Its subsequent pervasiveness thus constitutes an embedded legacy of colonialism that raises, among others, questions of hospitality to different beliefs, the inculturation and/or syncretisation of formerly alien beliefs, and religious fundamentalism. It is an area of enquiry that has been largely neglected and which is important to consider in some detail (Spivak, 2007; Young, 10-11-2010). For these reasons, Adichie’s work provides a valuable opening. However, her work does not only focus exclusively on Christianity. While it is central in *Purple Hibiscus*, a novel that lends itself to an overtly Christian interpretation (see for instance Chennells (2009)), in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie’s interest in the ethics of belief is both broader and more dispersed, surfacing in the intersections of a rational, secular understanding of the world with traditional, Christian and Islamic understandings.

The different emphasis on belief in the novels is of course due to the fact that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a different kind of novel to *Purple Hibiscus*. Where the latter is a *Bildungsroman* that narrates the spiritual growth and major transition in Kambili’s life, namely her changing understanding of

Catholicism, the former is a more complex, mainly historical novel. Concerned to recount the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), it does so through narrating its effects and the years preceding it on the level of the everyday, romantic lives of its focalisers. Thus John Marx (2008) comments that the novel “has a lowbrow cousin who can be found in the ‘historicals’ section of the romance-novel shelf” (p. 612). Adichie complicates this, though, by incorporating aspects of the *Bildungsroman* in the narrative of Ugwu: the story of whose education and growth echoes on a number of points that of Triton in Romesh Gunsekera’s *Reef* (1998), one of Adichie’s favourite novels (Tunca & Adichie, 2005). The interweaving of these different narrative forms results, as will be seen, in a nuanced representation of the Biafran war and a corresponding widening of the ethical scope beyond the interactions of different belief systems, though this remains important.

As in the previous chapter, I will approach Adichie’s novels by way of their recognitions, drawing out how their ethical sense unfolds through them. However, the shaping of the novels by their generic forms and the geographical and historical settings which I have just outlined is, importantly, a simultaneous shaping of the recognitions that are found in them. This in turn affects the relationship between the ethical knowledge to which the characters come and the ethics of the novel as a whole. For instance, in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Hungry Tide* there are recognitions that pertain to the moral self of a main character. In the former, Kambili comes to both a spiritual and an ethical awakening regarding her Catholicism and her relationship with her father, while in the latter Kanai has a psychically disturbing recognition regarding his affiliation to a class of people that regards the poor as irrelevant and dispensable. The narrative structure of *The Hungry Tide*, as we have seen, draws this crucial recognition into the wider ethical shape of the narrative, namely the injustice of the massacre at Morichjhāpi and the complexity of navigating between conflicting values. In *Purple Hibiscus*, however, Kambili’s recognition and consequent change forms the predominant ethical shape of the narrative, to which the other recognitions in the narrative are subordinated. As a result, the recognitions are more dispersed, accruing over time to bring about the main realisation and transformation in the narrative. In this regard, *Half of a Yellow Sun* has more similarities to *The*

Hungry Tide as it is likewise concerned with an historical event. It is here that the shaping effect of geographical and historical context on the recognition's predicate will be important. Before considering the details of the novels, then, it is necessary to fill in some of that context, namely the history of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, going into specific detail with Christianity which is Adichie's primary concern. This will lead me to introduce the ideas of inculturation and syncretism, as well to reflect upon Adichie's citing of Achebe, a common occurrence in much contemporary Nigerian writing.

II

In considering, first, the history of Christianity in Nigeria, Adichie's short story 'The Headstrong Historian' (2009a) provides a useful starting point. In brief, the story tells us about the life of Nwamgba, an Igbo village woman born (we suppose) in the late nineteenth century. We learn of her happy marriage to Obierika, her multiple miscarriages, and the finally joyful birth of her son Anikwenwa. Upon Obierika's suspiciously early death, however, what looked to be a promising future is suddenly threatened as Obierika's malevolently jealous cousins (whom she suspects of poisoning Obierika) begin to appropriate parts of her late husband's estate. As time passes Nwamgba feels increasingly threatened by them and begins to fear that they might dispose of Anikwenwa by secretly selling him into slavery. Her only solution is to act on the stories she's been hearing about the white man, about his courts and his missionary schools: she sends Anikwenwa to school. Going first to an Anglican mission, Nwamgba ends up taking her son to the Catholic mission instead when she learns that the Anglicans teach in the vernacular; Nwamgba had gone to the missionary school "in search of English" so as to empower Anikwenwa to reclaim what is rightfully his (p. 208). While the Catholic missionaries are brutal in distributing punishment, Anikwenwa learns well and is able after a time to reclaim from Obierika's cousins what belongs to him. However, the school does more than Nwamgba thought it would and soon Anikwenwa eschews the food and way of life of his tribe as respectively tainted and idolatrous. Sorrowful, Nwamgba rests her hopes in the Igbo belief in reincarnation,

believing that Obierika will be reborn in her grandchild. Her first grandchild follows his father's ways, but in her granddaughter, Afamefuna the headstrong historian of the title (named Grace by her father), Obierika's spirit is indeed reborn. In Afamefuna there is a return to the ways of her ancestors as she rejects her father's and brother's dour, sanctimonious ways. And we learn that in her future she will become an acclaimed historian, working to restore the dignity of the Igbo through rewriting the history of their colonial encounter. We learn this in a prolepsis, however, and the narrative closes with the teenaged Afamefuna holding her grandmother's hand as she passes away.

This is a rich story, not least in its citations of Achebe which I will consider a little later. What I want to dwell on now are the salient themes in the history of Christianity that can be discerned in it. The first white men that Nwamgba sees are Catholic missionaries "from France, far across the sea. They were all of the Holy Ghost Congregation; they had arrived in Onicha in 1885 and were building their school and church there" (p. 205). Contact with Europe through trade along the west coast had been present since the late fifteenth century. Though there had been a number of attempts to spread Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, in West Africa since then there was no substantial, lasting Christian presence until the advent of modern missions in the nineteenth century due to the natural barriers of desert and forest that hindered the spread of Christianity from North and East Africa where it has been present since shortly after its founding²³ (Isichei, 1995; Parrinder, 1969). In the nineteenth century, missionary attention moved progressively around the western coast of Africa, turning first to Sierra Leone in 1792 with the arrival of more than a thousand African settlers from Nova Scotia (Isichei, 1995, p. 160; Parrinder, 1969, p. 124), and then to the Gold Coast, now Ghana, where the modern missionary enterprise began with the arrival of the Basel missionaries in 1828 (Isichei, 1995, p. 160; Parrinder, 1969, p. 126). In Nigeria there were two early encounters with Christianity. In 1842 Thomas Birch Freeman preached in Badagry near the western limit of present-day Nigeria, while the first Christian contact with the Igbo specifically was a year earlier, in 1841,

²³ Interestingly, the barriers of forest and desert did not prevent Islam from spreading southwards into West Africa.

during the Niger River Expedition which stopped over at the village of Abo (Ubah, 1988, p. 75; Ifemesia, 1980). It was indirectly from this mission, due to the presence of Samuel Crowther, that the first permanent Christian presence in Nigeria would eventually come. Crowther was a catechist at the time of the failed Niger Expedition, but became the first African Anglican bishop and was crucial in spreading Christianity further inland than was managed by others at that time (Parrinder, 1969, pp. 132-133). In 1857 he led a Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission that “established a permanent station at Onitsha” (Ubah, 1988, p. 75), but advancement from there was slow. As Achebe (2009) puts it, “The first missionaries came to the Niger River town of Onitsha in 1857. From that beachhead they finally reached my town, Ogidi, in 1892. Now, the distance from Onitsha to Ogidi is only seven miles. Seven miles in thirty five years: that is one mile every five years. That is no whirlwind” (p. 7). This was a common feature of missions in West Africa, and “[b]y 1900, western and Christian influences had touched only the fringes of [West African] cultures”, with Christians remaining in the minority even where their presence had been long-established (Isichei, 1995, p. 155). Nevertheless, in 1885 the CMS mission at Onicha [Onitsha in Igbo] was joined by another: the Holy Ghost Fathers of Adichie’s story (Ubah, 1988, p. 75).

That the missionary enterprise was closely linked with the colonial one is gestured towards in the story when Nwamgba sees the Holy Ghost Fathers. She is the first person to ask a question, and rather than ask about Christianity she quite naturally queries after the stories that she has been hearing about the white man: “Had they brought their guns by any chance, the ones used to destroy the people of Agueke, and could she see one?”. The missionaries respond “that it was the soldiers of the British government and merchants of the Royal Niger Company who destroyed villages; they, instead, brought good news” (p. 205). The missionaries are, strictly speaking, correct. However, the connections between the missionaries and the colonial enterprise do not allow for a complete separation. As Kalu (1980) comments, “both the government and the missions looked upon the civilization of the black man as their paramount goal” (p. 182), and this common goal was strengthened by practical considerations: the government provided practical services “on which

survival and evangelism depended” while the missionaries, in turn, acted as “agents provocateurs for western civilisation” (p. 183). The two enterprises were sufficiently separate, however, for there to be points of conflict between them, though there were never any public incidents. Afigbo (1980) notes three main conflicts. One was the brutality that the colonial government showed in its treatment of the local populace, and against which the missionaries spoke out: an endeavour that won local people’s esteem and trust. Additionally, however, while the missionaries may have attempted to prevent the poor treatment of Africans, they were on a collision course of their own with the local culture. The missionaries wanted either to eradicate or totally reform the local culture, which they saw as godless and evil, while the colonial government wanted to shore it up. On the one hand, they did not want the locals becoming too westernised, and on the other they wanted to institute indirect rule (Kalu, 1980). Furthermore, as Ubah (1988) notes, the government was highly concerned with the maintenance of law and order and wanted to avert the conflicts that arose between the new Christian order and the old one; a concern of enough importance that missionaries were only allowed to work in a town if they were welcomed by the warrant chiefs (pp. 78-79).

It is what Afigbo notes as the third point of conflict, however, that was the source of greatest conflict, and is an important theme in Adichie’s story: education. The missionary schools had been running for a number of decades before the government was in a position to turn its attention to education. Isichei notes that in “1942 [the missions] controlled 99 per cent of Nigeria’s schools, and 97 per cent of all students were in mission schools” (1995, p. 270). The conflict arose due to very different goals in education. For the missionaries, education was the primary means of evangelisation and conversion. For this reason it was limited and not very advanced. The colonial government, meanwhile, wanted administrators and clerks and so attempted to take control of the schools, primarily through funding pressures that required schools to meet a certain standard in order to qualify for grants (Isichei, 1995, pp. 270-272); they never quite succeeded. As Adichie’s short story depicts, the schools were successful among the Igbo because of the prestige, power, and potential material benefit that were associated with any level of western education. Nwamgba sent Anikwenwa to the school seeking the

power that speaking the coloniser's language would bring, only to wonder later, upon seeing him completely Christianised and westernised, if she "had meddled with his destiny" (p. 212). This was an important practical alliance between colonial rule and missions: colonial rule increased the prestige, power and material benefit accruing around western education leading to higher attendance, while the mission schools provided western education and converted those who attended. It is in part due to this that there was a sudden, massive spread of Christianity throughout southern Nigeria, particularly among the Ibo in the first half of the twentieth century (Ubah, 1988; Isichei, 1995).

Anikwenwa goes to the missionary school, becomes a catechist, and rejects as much of his mother's way of life as he is able. The ethical concern raised here of relating to a culture and a spirituality different from your own is central to *Purple Hibiscus*, as is the legacy of "a self-perpetuating tradition of severity, verging on brutality" in the schools (Isichei, 1995, p. 270). But it is in Afamefuna and the choices that she makes that an echo of the movement made by Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* can be heard. With her faith unspecified and her deep respect for the ways of her ancestors (both suggestive and important facts, raising the question of syncretism and inculturation, but more on this later) it is in her, as the rebirth of her grandfather's spirit, that the continuance of her people is ensured, engaging the interplay of generations and the existence of the past in the future in a way similar to *Purple Hibiscus* (Chennells, 2009, p. 23; Walder, 2011, p. 129). I will return to these themes in detail in my analysis of the novels.

Christianity was not the only religion in Nigeria that benefitted from colonialism. While the spread of Islam was not tied to the colonial project after the manner of Christianity, British colonial policy nevertheless played a crucial, if partly unintended, role in spreading Islam to its present level, in addition to enforcing the divisions between the north, west and the east along religious lines. Islam came to Africa in 640, shortly after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, with the conquest of the "Byzantine fortress of Babylon" near the location of present-day Cairo, and the surrender of Alexandria, Egypt, the following year (Parrinder, 1969, p. 171). So began the spread of Islam in

Northern Africa through conquest by Islamic empires, eventually covering the whole of North Africa and replacing Christianity as the dominant religion (Parrinder, 1969, pp. 171-181). West Africa, however, due to forest and desert, was isolated from “the great Islamic empires in the North” (Parrinder, 1969, p. 183), and it was only through the journeys of Muslim traders following the routes southwards down the coast from Morocco that Islam began to enter the region some four hundred years later. Initially, it spread only among some of the elite and in the eleventh century there were in the Kingdom of Gana “twelve mosques and Muslims were among the court officials” (Parrinder, 1969, p. 182). An important event in the further spread of Islam in West Africa occurred in 1076 when the capital of Gana was sacked by the Almoravids. The Tuareg (the inhabitants of the Western Sahara) followers of Ibn Yasin sent his people on a holy war, conquering Morocco as well as Gana. With the fall of Gana, the kingdom of Mali rose in its place. Its rulers were Muslim, and Islam spread gradually among the elite (the rulers and traders) of the region assisted by the successive influence of the Mali and the Songhai empires. This was further aided by the importance of Islam for trade links to the North, and of Arabic as a lingua franca and for literacy (Parrinder, 1969, pp. 183-186).

It was only in the nineteenth century that the greatest spread of Islam in West Africa occurred. Where before Islam had “been fragmented... surviving only by fitting into African ways of life” (raising, again, the topic of inculturation) there were now “great urges towards the formation of Islamic states, ruled by the law of Islam imposed upon older forms of society” (Parrinder, 1969, p. 187), and a number of Islamic leaders in West Africa led holy wars to this end. Among them was ‘Uthman dan Fodio, a Fulani, who led a jihad against the Hausa in Northern Nigeria, conquering Zaria in 1805 and Kano in 1809. Only Bornu, which had its “own religious military leader” was able to fend off ‘Uthman’s forces (Parrinder, 1969, p. 189). Islam was subsequently imposed upon the Hausa, and when the British arrived only about half of them followed Islam and ‘Uthman’s empire was declining and partially fragmented (Parrinder, 1969, p. 189). The arrival of the British was fortuitous, then, as under colonial rule Christian missionaries were prevented from entering the north, and the colonial administrators, unaware that in many regions Islam was prevalent mostly only among the elite, backed and

consolidated the power of the emirs and made Islam the official religion, with the result that “tribes where a majority followed traditional religion were subjected to Islamic rule” (Parrinder, 1969, p. 206). There was therefore a sharp increase in the number of Muslims in the north, though there was also a large, more organic spreading of Islam “among the Yoruba who were beyond Fulani rule in western Nigeria” (Parrinder, 1969, p. 206). In any case, by the time of the civil war in the sixties, the setting of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nigeria was divided along religious and regional lines, with Muslims in the north and west, and Christians in the east.

The religious context and history of Nigeria sharpens the ethical significance of the interactions between faiths, raising the important topic of inculturation. Islam spread in West Africa through a combination of force and imposition and a more organic extension through channels of usefulness and opportunity, while Christianity largely lacked the inculturation and tolerance that was often exhibited by the early Christians in North Africa. It is only in later generations, as with Afamefuna in ‘The Headstrong Historian’, that a return to more traditional ways of life is achieved. Not by a return to a “pure” past but rather, in her case, through something of a non-religious form of inculturation. The term inculturation, Gallagher (2003) notes, developed in sociology where it mainly designated the process of “socialisation”, that is, how people “[learn] the ways of the group through social formation” (p. 118). It has come to have a “specifically [Christian] theological meaning”, designating the belief that “evangelisation, echoing the incarnation itself, demands ‘the insertion of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures’” (pp. 118-119), which would then give rise to “original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought” (cited in Chennells (2009, p. 18)). This theological understanding of inculturation will be pertinent for my reading of Adichie.

There is much that could be said about inculturation and the debates surrounding it, but what is salient here are two of its theological underpinnings. The most important is the incarnation (Gallagher, 2003; Manethodath, 1990). In a similar way to Jesus’ incarnation into Jewish culture, so the Gospel is to be inculturated into various other cultures. As Gallagher explains it, “inculturation

imitates, so to speak, that embracing of humanity by God in Christ, in order to give flesh to the gospel again in different cultures” (2003, p. 122). There are, however, limits to this model. It needs to be supplemented by the acknowledgment of the need for the redemption and change of all cultures, the difficulty of the process of inculturation, as well as the recognition that what is inculturated is not simply the transcendent Word of God but an already inculturated faith (pp. 122-124). Nevertheless, the incarnation remains as the pivotal theological basis, and opens on to the second one, which it implies: the value of all cultures and religions. Explicitly addressed by the Catholic Church for the first time in Vatican II (Manathodath, 1990, p. 95), it acknowledges that non-Christian religions, in the words of that council, “reflect a ray of the truth which enlightens everyone” and that each religion is worthy of respect due to it being the product of man striving after God (pp. 94-99). As such, it rejects the approach to traditional cultures that was exhibited by the Christian missionaries in Nigeria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And in so doing, brings to the fore a question which Adichie addresses – what would an inculturated Catholicism in Nigeria look like? The ethics of the different approaches to traditional culture and religion, and the different forms of Christianity that they represent, are explored in *Purple Hibiscus*, constituting a central axis along which Kambili’s narrated journey progresses.

There are several important echoes here of Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1960) that can be noted. First, in both ‘The Headstrong Historian’ and *Purple Hibiscus*, the engagement with traditional ways of life and the negotiation of a mixed heritage (both colonial and traditional) is undertaken by a later generation. There is also an explicit citation of Achebe in the short story, when we read that Afeefuna’s school textbook has a chapter that shares nearly the exact title of Achebe’s fictional book from the end of *Things Fall Apart*: ‘The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria’ (p. 215). Adichie’s wider work, though, is, as Boehmer notes, “stamped with numerous filiative gestures towards Achebe” (2009, p. 148). The most overt citation in the novels is Adichie’s opening line in *Purple Hibiscus*: “Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère”

(2005, p. 3). Later in the novel (though chronologically earlier) we see Kambili, the narrator, going to stay with her Auntie Ifeoma who lives on Marguerite Cartwright Avenue in Nsukka, the same road on which Achebe lived for a number of years. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007a) Adichie mimics Achebe by unexpectedly inverting the reader's understanding in a similar manner to the ending in *Things Fall Apart*. Having been led to suppose that the book *The World Was Silent When We Died*, which the narrator tracks throughout the story, is written by Richard the novel closes with the revelation that its author is, instead, Ugwu – a shift that Boehmer aptly terms an “anti-colonial... twist” (p. 148). There are, additionally, many untranslated Igbo words in both novels (see Cooper (2008)), while in *Half of a Yellow Sun* there is incorporated into “the configurations of plot and character” the motif of twins (Boehmer, 2009, p. 148). Such citation of Achebe is fairly common among, though certainly not exclusive to, contemporary Nigerian writers (Boehmer, 2009; Osinubi, 2009). Osinubi, commenting on this trend in “third generation” Nigerian authors specifically, argues that “*Things Fall Apart* returns in these new narratives because they deal with new crises of language and ideology” (p. 160). Certainly, as I have adumbrated, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are organised around moments of crisis and their accompanying recognitions.

What is particularly important with regard to Adichie's citation of Achebe, to bring these contextual and introductory comments to a close, is her incorporation of Achebe's concern with Christianity into *Purple Hibiscus*, though from a less sceptical perspective. When Christianity first arrives in Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, it is not unanimously hostile to the local religion and culture. One missionary, Mr Brown, is singled out for admiration by some of the “great men” in the village ([1958] 2006, p. 168). The reason for this admiration is that Mr Brown “trod softly on its [the clan's] faith” (p. 168). His approach fosters dialogue and mutual understanding: “Whenever Mr Brown went to that village he spent long hours with Akunna [one of the great men] in his *obi* talking through an interpreter about religion. Neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learnt more about their different beliefs” (p. 169). Ill health forces Mr Brown to leave, and his successor “condemned openly Mr Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation” (p. 174). The result is that the missionaries and

converts become increasingly antagonistic towards the clan's faith, with the final consequence of the clan razing the church building to the ground. We have briefly seen this hostile manifestation of Christianity in Adichie's 'The Headstrong Historian', though there is also a Mr Brown equivalent in Father O'Donnell (p. 213). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's crisis of faith and filial love sees her making an ethical choice between these different manifestations of Christianity, and moving away from a colonial, intolerant form of Catholicism into an inculturated one in which some elements of traditional Igbo spirituality continue to exist. As I turn now to consider the novels, first *Purple Hibiscus* then *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we will see these moments of crisis – shaped by the influence of Achebe and the Christian legacy of colonialism – navigated through particular ethical recognitions which often precede and, to some extent, resolve them.

III

The opening section of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2005) – "Breaking Gods: Palm Sunday" – contains the novel's moment of greatest change. Kambili's brother, "Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (p. 3). This apparently simple defiance is highly significant and rich in imagery, though the reader only discovers the full meaning in the analepsis that makes up the majority of the novel. Eugene, Kambili and Jaja's father, is an abusive man tyrannically ruling his family in accordance with an intolerant, Eurocentric Catholicism, and Jaja's defiance is the first open resistance to his rule from within the family. The result is an alteration in family relations: when Jaja later defies his father for a second time that day, Kambili notices "a shadow clouding Papa's eyes, a shadow that had been in Jaja's eyes. Fear. It had left Jaja's eyes and entered Papa's" (p. 13). No longer does Eugene rule over Jaja; it is now Eugene that is marked by fear. The fuller meaning of this opening moment begins to unfold when we learn that the shattered figurines used to serve as Kambili and Jaja's mother's refuge after being beaten by her husband. Once after hearing a beating, "like something banging against the door", Kambili went downstairs and saw her mother "standing by the étagère with a kitchen towel soaked in soapy water.

She spent at least a quarter of an hour on each ballet-dancing figurine” (p. 10). What Eugene in his anger destroys, then, is the one coping mechanism that is available to Beatrice to sustain her through the abuse. Rather than being the devastating event for her as one might expect, however, it is liberating.

The knowledge that this moment at which things fall apart is positive and not a disaster as the citation of Achebe’s title initially implies, comes to Kambili through two entwined recognitions. Asking her mother whether she will replace the figurines, and being told in reply that she will not, Kambili thinks, “Maybe Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it” (p. 15). The “now” is important, recurring in the second recognition, and marking the moment of realisation. Reaching it through witnessing the continued and, most importantly, unpunished defiance of Jaja, the predicate of Kambili’s recognition begins as the figurines and broadens to include the *peripeteia* itself, the extent to which the moment of Eugene breaking the figurines has changed everything. This recognition is also (we assume) the reason why Kambili the narrator places this short section, only a dozen pages long, in a position of pre-eminence, organising the rest of the narrative around it by titling part two, “Speaking with our Spirits: Before Palm Sunday”, and part three, “The Pieces of Gods: After Palm Sunday”. It is only with the brief, closing part four that “Palm Sunday” ceases to be the organising term.

That the narrative is structured around a Christian feast adds a second layer of meaning to the breaking of the figurines: what Eugene throws at Jaja, and which breaks the ballerinas, is his leather bound missal, a book containing the liturgy for the mass and the different Christian feasts and seasons.²⁴ We thus have the suggestive image of the Catholic liturgy breaking Beatrice’s source of comfort and marking the end of the order of things in which they were needed; it is an image which foreshadows (and, chronologically, encapsulates) the crucial role that an inculturated Catholicism,

²⁴ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10354c.htm> Accessed 16 November 2010.

different to Eugene's, will be seen to play in bringing about this change. And this is additionally signalled by the substance of Jaja's defiance – he refuses to take communion – bringing into play from the opening the ambiguity of Catholicism in the narrative as both that which can be oppressive, and must be resisted, as well as that which can be liberating.

The meaning of Jaja's defiance constitutes the predicate of the second recognition in this section. Immediately after the first, Kambili's understanding continues to shift: "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscuses: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom... A freedom to be, to do" (p. 16). When Jaja first defies their father, Kambili is intensely distressed. In the silence immediately following the breaking of the figurines, her distress manifests itself in feeling "suffocated": "The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me. Even the glass dining table was moving toward me" (p. 7). In the claustrophobic silence everyone continues to act "so normal[ally]" (p. 8) that Kambili cannot bear it, and leaves the room. She passes an anxious few hours, worrying about what their father will do to Jaja, and when Jaja defies him a second time at lunch she is further distressed and terrified. "This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure... The sky would cave in. The Persian rug... would shrink. Something would happen" (p. 14). But nothing happens. And it is only later that evening that she "now" begins to realise the afternoon's significance: that rather than being a cause of distress and fear of what their father might do in response, Jaja's defiance is, in fact, the fragrance of freedom.

A different reading of the significance of Catholicism and Kambili's distress in this opening section is offered by Brenda Cooper in her study *A New Generation of African Writers* (2008). Cooper argues that Kambili's moment of suffocation where the furniture seems to be bearing down on her, and her fear that the compound wall will fall down or that the Persian rugs will shrink, are the work of the spirits, the *mmuo* that we encounter later in the novel, as they appear "in all the moments of stress or emotion in her life" (p. 113). In this reading, which argues for a more syncretic form of Catholicism,

the figurines “are Mama’s protecting spirits” and the “étagère was Mama’s shrine” (p. 116). The *mmuo* consequently “play havoc with the family... in response to Papa’s onslaught on their sacredness, when he throws his leatherbound church records book at Jaja, which smashes the figurines they inhabit” (p. 113). Rather than signifying the liberating potential of Catholicism, then, Cooper understands this moment as representing the conflict between Catholicism and traditional spirituality. My reading differs from hers for two reasons. On the one hand her reading of Kambili’s experiences in this way does not quite seem to fit. For instance, it fails to explain Kambili’s fear that the sky will cave in. Wedged between her other fears of that moment, it is suggestive that Cooper cites all of them except this one (p. 113). Most importantly, Cooper’s argument hinges on understanding the scene with the *mmuo*, the masquerade, as recognising their veracity; however, in my analysis of this important moment of recognition I suggest instead that it should be understood as accomplishing the opposite.

This scene with the *mmuo* is one of four key recognitions in the analepsis that makes up part two of the novel, and which, taken together, result in Kambili’s recognition of liberty on Palm Sunday. The first two that I will consider have as their predicates different forms of spirituality and religion. Kambili comes, first, to recognise a tolerant form of Catholicism, and as she is immersed within it she comes to understand the vitality and value of her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu’s spiritual life. Papa-Nnukwu is significant for the next recognition in which Kambili realises his value for her life and, importantly, that her father’s Catholicism has robbed her of it. The last recognition, in which also a family member is part of the predicate, sees Kambili realising an important difference between how she and her cousins were raised. Before considering each moment of recognition, I want to note that while the ethical impact of each might appear minimal, their importance for Kambili’s initial (or final) recognition of freedom is what gives that recognition its ethical shape and potency: they reveal the order of things that falls apart on Palm Sunday as one of an intolerant Catholicism which has robbed Kambili of a valuable relationship with her grandfather, is blind to the value in other traditions, and is horribly abusive. The transition that Kambili goes through in her recognition of the disintegration of

that order as freedom is thus a powerful, ethical rejection of her father's way of life for one that is better; for one that is inculturated, hospitable, respectful and nurturing. A large part of the narrative features Kambili detailing for us how things came to this point, how the red hibiscuses in the garden came to be mixed with the rare, purple hibiscuses – themselves a product of biological inculturation, as it were – which bloom as the brother and sister begin to experience the “freedom to be, to do” (p. 16).

Kambili is raised in the intolerant, Eurocentric strain of Catholicism that I noted in both Achebe's work and Adichie's short story. In *Purple Hibiscus* it is framed by the beautiful, European style church of St Agnes, which has “iridescent saints on the floor-to-ceiling stained-glass windows” and a marble altar with “steps that glowed like polished ice blocks” (2005, p. 28). The Virgin Mary is depicted in the stained-glass windows as blonde, and Igbo is “not acceptable” for the recitation of the Credo and the Kyrie, though Igbo songs are disdainfully tolerated during the ofatory: “[Father Benedict] called them native songs, and when he said ‘native’ his straight-line lips turned down at the corners to form an inverted U” (p. 4). This attitude towards Igbo as inferior extends beyond church services into the family's daily life, where Eugene “did not like us to speak [Igbo] in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English” (p. 13). As Kambili recalls her aunt Ifeoma describing it, Eugene is “too much of a colonial product” (p. 13).

One of the defining features of Eugene's Catholicism, in addition to the idolisation of all things European (Chennells, 2009, p. 18), is the hostility to non-Christians and non-Christian spirituality, something that we begin to see when the family travels to Abba, their home village, for Christmas. Papa-Nnukwu, the children's (impoverished) paternal grandfather is a traditionalist and Eugene has, for this reason, excluded him and any other non-Christian from entering the family's luxurious compound. Under pressure from the community Eugene allows Kambili and Jaja to visit his father once a year when they go to Abba for Christmas. He gives them the following instruction each time before sending them off: “Remember, don't touch any food, don't drink anything. And, as usual, you

will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes..... I don't like to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you" (pp. 61-62), an instruction that echoes the experiences of Obi (the son of Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart*) in *No Longer at Ease*. Eugene himself never visits his father. In contrast to this Kambili tells us of her maternal grandfather, whom, when he was still alive, the family would visit before even reaching their own compound. A very light skinned man, "almost albino," he "determinedly spoke English, always, in a heavy Igbo accent. He knew Latin, too, often quoted the articles of Vatican I, and spent most of his time at St Paul's, where he had been the first catechist" (p. 67).

Vatican 1, which Kambili's maternal grandfather liked to quote, was convened at the height of imperialism (1869-1870). 'Canons 1' states: "If anyone denies the one true God, creator and lord of things visible and invisible: let him be anathema." I note this since although the declaration of "one true God" is common to Christianity in its many permutations, and the formulae "If anyone... let him be anathema" is common to all the Church Councils from Nicaea to Vatican 1²⁵, there is an element of exclusion which in Eugene's understanding of Catholicism is applied to all of life rather than to the spiritual blessings that are administered to the Christian by the Church. The Greek word *anathema* designates the most extreme form of excommunication.²⁶ While in Old Testament usage it meant being separated off and marked for complete destruction (and could be used to designate a thing, an animal, or a person), in the New Testament and the earliest Church Councils it ceases to entail death and is synonymous with excommunication. From the sixteenth century onwards, however, a distinction is made and *anathema* is placed at the extreme end of a series of degrees of excommunication: "minor excommunication, formerly incurred by a person holding communication with anyone under the ban of excommunication [this was formally abolished in 1884²⁷]; major excommunication, pronounced by the Pope in reading a sentence; and anathema, or the penalty

²⁵ <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=710>, Accessed 30.07.2010.

²⁶ In what follows I will be drawing from <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=710>.

²⁷ <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4487> Accessed 01.08.2010.

incurred by crimes of the gravest order, and solemnly promulgated by the Pope.”²⁸ Those who are *anathema* are thus excluded from Christian fellowship and it is this exclusion that Eugene extends indiscriminately, trying to protect his life from what he perceives as the tainting influence of the heathen.

Nearly a hundred years after the first Vatican Council, the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) provided a corrective to this interpretation, an intervention which made it, as I have mentioned, the first Ecumenical Council to address non-Christian religions directly. Explicitly rejecting the form of Catholicism which Eugene exemplifies, it takes a decisive step towards inculturation as an important spiritual practise. It exhorts Catholics to dialogue with non-Christians, making provision for the liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular – a provision for which permission initially had to be sought from Rome, until it was delegated to the national councils due to the large number of requests. It is the tolerant, inculturated Catholicism envisaged by this post-imperial Council that we see in Eugene’s sister’s family and their priest Father Amadi. He helps to care for Papa-Nnukwu, sees Christ in the faces of the impoverished boys whom he coaches in football, and uses Igbo during Mass. And Ifeoma’s family breaks into an Igbo song after praying each decade of the rosary. Kambili first encounters this form of Catholicism when a visiting priest, whom she later recognises as Father Amadi, conducts Mass at St Agnes on Pentecost. He is unlike all the other visiting priests: he neither praises the beauty of the church, nor suggests that because of it “God’s presence dwelled more in St Agnes” (p. 28). Additionally, “halfway through his sermon, he broke into an Igbo song” (p. 28). The congregation “drew in a collective breath, some sighed, some had their mouths in a big O. They were used to Father Benedict’s sparse sermons, to Father Benedict’s pinch-your-nose monotone” (p. 28). Eugene criticises Father Amadi after the service as one who is likely to “bring trouble to the church” (p. 29). Kambili only meets Father Amadi and his form of Catholicism again when she and Jaja go to spend some time with their aunt Ifeoma from Nsukka.

²⁸ <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=710>, Accessed 30.07.2010.

It is through the influence of Ifeoma and her family that Kambili passes through the series of recognitions that lead her to defy her father for herself and, ultimately, to her recognition of Jaja's defiance as the blooming of freedom in their lives. Ifeoma first appears in the narrative when her family joins the Achike family for Christmas in Abba, and we are quickly made aware of the difference between the two families. Kambili's cousins arrive late because they are with "Papa-Nnukwu, and he had just started one of his stories. You know how he likes to go on and on." Kambili "did not know that he liked to go on and on. ...did not even know that he told stories" (p. 72). From the very first arrival of Ifeoma's family, the narrative signals the sharp difference between the two families' relationship to Papa-Nnukwu. I will return to this crucial difference a little further on.

There is a second difference between the two families that quickly becomes apparent: Kambili's cousins freely accompany Ifeoma to see the *mmuo*, the masquerade. Eugene will only allow Jaja and Kambili to go "sightseeing" (p. 77) with Ifeoma if she agrees that they will not stop if they see the *Mmuo*. Ifeoma agrees, but then proceeds to take the children to see the *mmuo* anyway, picking up Papa-Nnukwu en route and bringing us to the first of Kambili's recognitions. When they arrive at the masquerade, "cars lined the road almost bumper to bumper" and the people crowded around the cars so densely that "there was no space between people and they blended into one another" (p. 85). The procession of *mmuo* had already begun and Papa-Nnukwu begins to explain each spirit as it passes by. Suddenly he shouts, "Look away! Women cannot look at this one!" (p. 86). The spirit which passes is the "most powerful *mmuo* in our parts, and all the neighbouring villages fear Abba because of it" (p. 86). The way in which the others respond is revealing: "Aunty Ifeoma looked amused, but she turned her head away. 'Don't look girls. Let's humor your grandfather,' she said in English. Amaka had already looked away. I looked away too..." (p. 86). Brenda Cooper comments of this scene, "The novel distances itself from Papa's rejection of Igbo beliefs and customs as 'devilish folklore' on many occasions and not least of all here" (2008, p. 113). Cooper is referring particularly to the moment, as they are pulling up at the masquerade, that Kambili notes that "[papa] said that the stories about the *mmuo*... were all devilish folklore. *Devilish Folklore*. It sounded dangerous the way Papa said it" (p.

85). There is, indeed, a distancing from this attitude towards the *mmuo*. Ifeoma's amusement, coupled with the revelation that Obiora, her eldest son, has been through the *ima mmuo* or, "the initiation into the spirit world" – which Eugene forbade Jaja from doing, saying that "Christians who let their sons do it were confused, [and] would end up in hellfire" (p. 87) – begins to disturb Kambili's acceptance of her father's view of the *mmuo* as dangerous and tainting.

It is however precisely because Ifeoma does not believe the *mmuo* to be real that she can be amused at Papa-Nnukwu's injunction to look away and can allow Obiora to go through the initiation. Ifeoma significantly describes looking away as "humor[ing]" Papa-Nnukwu, a position that is in sharp distinction from the women who "turned and dashed into nearby compounds" (p. 86). Coupled with the fact that she speaks in English so that Papa-Nnukwu cannot understand, the effect is a complete undermining of the *mmuo*'s veracity. As Chennells remarks, "Ifeoma's tolerant amusement and use of English distance herself and the children not only from Papa-Nnukwa [*sic*] but from those in the crowd to whom the masks are objects of awe and reverence, and her words reduce the masks to picturesque remnants of a tradition" (2009, p. 20). Chennells goes on to argue that in fact Ifeoma's response here is more sceptical than Eugene's, for whom the masquerade has the real "possibility of diabolical power" (p. 20). Eugene's description of the *mmuo* as "devilish folklore", however, seems to suggest otherwise. The potential power which the masquerades hold for Eugene rests not in their spiritual reality, but in their "heathen", non-Christian quality; his designation "folklore" suggests that he considers them no more real than does Ifeoma. As Father Benedict (whose interpretation of doctrine Eugene appears to follow) instructs Kambili later during confession, "You understand that it is wrong to take joy in pagan rituals, because it breaks the first commandment. Pagan rituals are misinformed superstition, and they are the gateway to Hell" (p. 106). What we see, then, is that both Ifeoma and Eugene understand the masquerade as lacking spiritual reality, viewing it either as a picturesque tradition, or devilish folklore. Ifeoma and her family, however, do not view it as dangerous. A result, in addition to Kambili recognising "the supernatural power that tradition once

accorded the masks” (Chennells, 2009, p. 20), she also has her first recognition of a different, more ethical way of relating to a non-Christian spirituality.

This scene is in counterpoint to the pilgrimage that Kambili, Amaka, Ifeoma and Father Amadi make to Aokpe where it is reported that the Virgin Mary is manifesting. There is the same mass of cars, the same crowd of people “packed so close that the smell of other people became as familiar as their own” (p. 275). Instead of tolerant amusement, however, at this point Kambili experiences the presence of the “Blessed Virgin”: “Then I saw her... an image in the pale sun, a red glow on the back of my hand, a smile on the face of the rosary-bedecked man whose arm rubbed against mine. She was everywhere” (p. 275). It is not specified whether the others in the car experienced anything, yet as they are driving away Ifeoma remarks, “Kambili is right... Something from God was happening there” (p. 275).

Although Ifeoma does not view the *mmuo* as spiritually real she also, however, does not entirely reject Papa-Nnukwu’s beliefs. The first glimpse of this is over Christmas while they are driving to the masquerade. Ifeoma and Papa-Nnukwu are talking about Eugene, whose neglect of his father Papa-Nnukwu blames on the missionaries. Ifeoma asks, “Did I not go to the missionary school, too?” (p. 83). In response Papa-Nnukwu conveys his gratitude for her exemplary care of him, going on to say, “My spirit will intercede for you, so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of you and the children”. Ifeoma’s immediate reply is, “Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer” (p. 83). There is, as Chennells notes (2009, p. 22), an ironic interplay of different traditions here. What is pertinent, however, is that Ifeoma acknowledges the reality of Papa-Nnukwu’s prayers, and it is this that becomes the predicate for Kambili’s second recognition.

While Kambili and Jaja are staying with Ifeoma in Nsukka she instructs Kambili one morning to watch Papa-Nnukwu complete his “*itu-nzu*, his declaration of innocence” (p. 166). Kambili does so, watching as he systematically gives thanks for the morning and health and prosperity, declare his innocence from evil, and ask for blessings for his family members (pp. 167-168). It is an enlightening experience

for Kambili, leading her to recognise the vitality and joy present in a different spiritual tradition. She is first surprised to hear him pray “for Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Aunty Ifeoma” (p. 168). But as Kambili watches him tie his wrapper once he is finished, what strikes her most is the fact that he is smiling. “I never smiled after we said the rosary back home”, she comments. “None of us did” (p. 169). The previous evening, Ifeoma had told Kambili that “sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar, that when Papa-Nnukwu did his *itu-nzu*... it was the same as our saying the rosary” (p. 166). And Kambili recognises here that “something from God” (p. 275) indeed happens in non-Christian religions or, as Vatican 2 puts it, that they “frequently reflect a ray of the truth which enlightens everyone.”

These two recognitions – of the life and joy that can be present in a different spiritual tradition and of a different way of relating to such a tradition – start Kambili along the path which culminates with her realisation of the intolerance and injustice of her father’s way of life. They are closely intertwined with the two later recognitions, though these have a different kind of predicate, namely, her familial relationships. As with the earlier ones, both of them occur through the influence of Ifeoma and her family’s spiritual life. The Catholicism that Kambili encounters in Nsukka is an inculturated Igbo Catholicism which “brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought” (cited in Chennells (2009, p. 18)). Thus in the same way as Eugene’s family, they pray the rosary every night. But unlike Eugene, after each decade they break into Igbo worship songs. The first time this happens Kambili is horrified, and neither she nor Jaja join in the singing. Jaja explains to Ifeoma that they do not sing at home, and she responds by simply stating that they do there (p. 125). It seems to be sufficient, and they join in from then on. Another difference from Eugene is that they pray for the Virgin Mary to intercede on behalf of Papa-Nnukwu: Eugene prays only that he be saved from the fires of hell. This causes Kambili to ask, “How can Our Lady intercede on behalf of a heathen, Aunty?” (p. 166), which leads to her observing Papa-Nnukwu as he prays and her corresponding recognition. In addition to this, being immersed in this hospitable, inculturated

Catholicism enables Kambili to spend time with Papa-Nnukwu in a way which was entirely unavailable to her before, and which will change her life entirely.

Kambili's relationship with her grandfather is a series of moments of exclusion, of recognising the absence of a real connection. Already during the drive to the *mmuo* over Christmas, Kambili begins to realise the richness of the relationship that her cousins have with her grandfather and to wish that things were different for her and Jaja. When they are living in the same house as him, this feeling is heightened. She consciously realises her lack for the first time when, in Nsukka, the power cuts and Papa-Nnukwu tells them a story. There is a response of *Njemanze!* which Kambili's cousins chant throughout the story, but she holds herself back. When the story is done, however, Kambili says, "I watched them and wished that I had joined in chanting the *Njemaze!* response" (p. 161). However, the most poignant moment of Kambili's longing for a connection with her grandfather is the day before Papa-Nnukwu dies.

Amaka has decided to paint a portrait of her grandfather. Watching the interaction between her cousin and Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili "felt a longing for something I knew I would never have. I wanted to get up and leave, but my legs did not belong to me, did not do what I wanted them to. Finally, I pushed myself up and went into the kitchen; neither Papa-Nnukwu nor Amaka noticed when I left" (p. 165). While helping her aunt in the kitchen, we see that her longing is circumscribed by her sense of exclusion: she "heard Amaka laughing in the living room with Papa-Nnukwu, and I wondered what they were laughing about, and whether they would stop laughing if I went in there" (p. 166). Her awareness that Amaka and Papa-Nnukwu have a relationship from which she is excluded, but which she longs to be a part of, informs her hesitation to mourn when Papa-Nnukwu dies the following morning. She is filled with regret and the growing realisation that her father and his abusive Catholicism are the cause of this loss: "I did not have a right to mourn Papa-Nnukwu with her [Amaka]; he had been her Papa-Nnukwu more than mine. She had oiled his hair while I kept away and wondered what Papa would say if he knew" (p. 187). With the irrevocable loss of Papa-Nnukwu,

Kambili begins to understand that she has been deprived of something good and valuable in her life. It is the beginning of the recognition that will result in her defiance and consequent hospitalisation.

As Kambili is packing her bags to return to Enugu, Ifeoma gives Jaja the symbolic purple hibiscuses to plant in their garden, while Amaka gives her the nearly finished painting of Papa-Nnukwu. She cherishes it dearly, stealing glimpses only when she knows that her father will not see. One afternoon a few days later, Kambili is showing the painting to Jaja when Eugene walks in and sees it. Both of them claim it as theirs when:

Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hands moved swiftly, working together. The painting was gone. It had already represented something lost, something I had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa's feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors....'No!' I shrieked. I dashed to the pieces on the floor as if to save them, as if saving them would mean saving Papa-Nnukwu. I sank to the floor, lay on the pieces of paper. (p. 210)

The absence of her grandfather in her life, something she never had and now would never have, is brought sharply into focus by the destruction of the last remnant symbolising the object of her longing. What she had begun to know through her emotional responses to Papa-Nnukwu is now fully and powerfully brought into consciousness in this moment of recognition, overwhelming her fear of her father and causing her to act against him for the first time in a desperate attempt to claim the last, now destroyed, remnant of Papa-Nnukwu. When she refuses to get off the pieces, Eugene begins to kick her and does not stop until she loses consciousness and is hospitalised. Once she is well enough again, she is discharged into Ifeoma's care and returns to Nsukka. It is shortly after this that Jaja and her return home and the purple hibiscuses start to bloom.

I have traced how the inculturated Catholicism in which Kambili is immersed in Nsukka, its hospitality to different spiritualities, made it possible for her to be exposed to Papa-Nnukwu and to recognise both the vitality of his spiritual life and that Eugene has wronged her, and indeed her entire family, through preventing a meaningful relationship with him. In the time that Kambili spends with Father Amadi, she comes to the fourth recognition, this time about her relationship with her father. Throughout the novel, Kambili can be seen to love her father fiercely, as well as to deeply fear him. In

the opening section, on Palm Sunday, we are introduced to a habit of Eugene's. Whenever he pours himself some tea, he offers Jaja and Kambili a sip.

A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved... The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it didn't matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me. (p. 8)

This suggestive image, of the pain of the love sip and the simultaneous joy of having the love burn in to her, captures something of the double relationship between Kambili and her father. Whenever Eugene is praised for his generosity to the church and charity organisations, for his courageous use of his newspaper to fight for liberal democracy in a time of military rule – for which “*Amnesty World* gave him a human rights award” (p. 5) – Kambili “would sit with [her] knees pressed together... trying hard to keep [her] face blank, to keep the pride from showing, because Papa said modesty was very important” (p. 5). This intense longing to do what pleases her father is seen throughout, even when she begins to move away from his form of Catholicism. So intense is this desire that she becomes jealous when someone else wins his approval, and feels “as though [her] mouth were full of melting sugar” when she herself does so (p. 26).

The burn, however, presages Eugene's physical abuse of his family which culminates with him literally burning her, pouring boiling water over her feet as a punishment for staying in the same house with Papa-Nnukwu for a week; and then only a few days later nearly kicking her to death. Although these are the worst instances and occur later in the narrative, Kambili has a deep fear of displeasing her father, of provoking his anger, and we see this early in the novel when she returns home from school with her report card, having come second in her class. For the next few days she lives in terror of what her father will do to punish her failure, though he does not hurt her on this occasion. Much later, she is watching Father Amadi train some of the local Nsukka boys in high jump. When the boys are not looking, he raises the bar a notch believing that they can clear it. At that moment she has a significant recognition of the difference between how her and her cousins were raised:

It was what Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time

believing they could scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't. (p. 226)

This recognition marks an important shift in Kambili's relationship with her father, taking place shortly after she is discharged from hospital. Combining with the previous recognitions, it enables her to distance herself from him and his abusive and intolerant ways, to recognise them for what they are. It is shortly after this that she recognises in part one the collapse of the old order as liberating.

The change can already be discerned, however, soon after the recognition. Previously, her father laid down the rule of right and wrong: what he says is sinful, is sinful; what he sets out in her daily programme for her to do, she will do. We can see this over Christmas: before the drive to the *mmuo* Ifeoma asks her if she would like to change into shorts. She responds, "I'm fine Aunt", and wonders "why I did not tell her that all my skirts stopped well past my knees, that I did not own any trousers because it was sinful for a woman to wear trousers" (p. 80). After her recognition, however, there is a small but crucial change. Attending Mass in Father Amadi's church, Kambili notices that many of the women do not have their hair "properly covered", and "others wore trousers, even jeans". On seeing this, Kambili thinks to herself, "Papa would be scandalized. A woman's hair must be covered in the house of God, and a woman must not wear a man's clothes, especially in the house of God, he would say" (p. 240). The fact that it is "Papa" who "would be scandalized" and that "he would say" that it is wrong signifies a crucial distance and thus an important shift in Kambili's relation to her father and, consequently, in her ethics. It is this distancing that is completed on Palm Sunday when everything falls apart.

Before bringing this analysis to a close, something needs to be said about the significance of the emotions in the novel. I have already noted the role they have played in Kambili's recognitions, particularly her recognition of the importance of Papa-Nnukwu to her. However, they also have a broader importance. After the events of Palm Sunday, in part three, Kambili states her love for Father Amadi, which has been steadily growing throughout the narrative. We have already seen that Father

Amadi represents an important influence, another form of Catholicism. But the primary impact that Father Amadi has on Kambili, or rather, the way in which he is so influential with Kambili, is in drawing her out of the shell in which her father has kept her. Silence is the norm in Eugene's household. Unsure at the start of the novel of what her own laughter sounds like, Father Amadi manages to help her actively enjoy herself and to be inquisitive. On the way back to Ifeoma's flat after their first afternoon alone together, Kambili replays the afternoon in her mind: "I had smiled, run, laughed. My chest filled with something like bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit" (p. 180). The image here is different from the description of her pleasure at gaining her father's approval. Where previously her mouth felt full of melting sugar, the imagery here is also of sweetness, but is combined with brightness and light. It is more powerful, and Kambili's love for Father Amadi is likewise more powerful than that for her father: it consumes her to the point that she envies the water he drinks.

It is this love that gives her the motivation to overcome the silence that has until then been imposed upon her. She begins to sing Igbo choruses with Father Amadi in his car, and when she returns to school before being hospitalised, she "joined the group of girls on the volleyball field on the second day of school", something she shied away from for fear of ridicule. However, she

did not hear the whispers of 'backyard snob' or the ridiculing laughter. I did not notice the amused pinches they gave one another. I stood waiting with my hands clasped until I was picked. I saw only Father Amadi's clay-colored face and heard only [him saying] "You have good legs for running." (p. 205)

It is Father Amadi that gives her the courage to make use of the freedom which opens up for her at the end of the novel, and it is because of this that in the final section he retains his importance. Eugene is dead, poisoned by his wife; Ifeoma and her family move to the United States; and Father Amadi is sent to Germany as a missionary. Once Eugene is dead Kambili still loves him, "offers Masses for [him] every Sunday", and wants "to see him in my dreams... so much I sometimes make my own dreams" (p. 306). Yet she has moved completely away from her Father's Catholicism. She attends St Andrews in Enugu where the priest is a Blessed Way Missionary Father like Father Amadi, and carries

Father Amadi's letters around on her person, "because they remind me of my worthiness, because they tug at my feelings" (p. 303).

Kambili's emotions also indicate for us most clearly the tragic ambiguity that exists in the figure of Eugene. I have noted that Kambili's love and respect for her father in large part reflects his work to keep publishing politically critical articles in his newspaper, despite the preventative pressure of the government; her fear of him reflects his devastating failure as a father and a husband. The effect of this mixture of responses is to problematise the rejection of Eugene's abuse and Catholicism that is carried out in the novel. Cooper accurately observes that "while Papa should be uncompromisingly condemned for the emotional and physical abuse he heaps on his family, he should also be appreciated, to some, albeit limited, extent, for the political stance he takes publically" (2008, p. 126). By extension the same applies to his Catholicism: the oppressive and intolerant strain of Catholicism that is rejected in the novel is what educated both Eugene and Ifeoma, and motivates both his political stance and his massive, secret donations (which are only discovered after his death) to hospitals and charities. This tension is cast by Cooper in terms of personal redemption, that is, whichever action is more ethically weighty defines the situation and Eugene's character, which in this case runs the risk of redeeming him. And it is a risk for Cooper, as Eugene's crimes are irredeemable (pp. 127-128). Although this is a valid and often necessary judgement to make, I want to emphasise that this can be productively read as another instance of the tragedy of the colonial legacy, where the ethical aspects of a situation or person are folded into one another and do not necessarily synthesize into a single conclusion. There is something worth salvaging from Eugene's life and Catholicism while there is simultaneously an urgent need to reject much of the same.

The dispersed recognitions that occur throughout the narrative bring about and shape Kambili's primary recognition and the transition and growth through which she moves in the novel, a transition that constitutes the novel's intervention into the ethical question of the interactions between different faiths and the value of inculturation. Nevertheless, the rejection of the form of Catholicism

which Eugene represents is no simple matter, being caught up in the embedded, tragic character of the legacy of colonialism. As I turn now to consider *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we will see that Adichie's concern with the ethics of belief remains pertinent as the setting of the novel brings to the fore the relationship between Christians and Muslims. There is also, as I noted in the introduction to the chapter, a widening of the ethical scope beyond the relatively narrow focus of *Purple Hibiscus*, to the ethics of remembrance.

IV

As I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the recognitions in *Half of a Yellow Sun* have an important difference from those in *Purple Hibiscus*. In the latter I tracked the progression of four dispersed recognitions that together shaped and brought about the primary, ethical recognition in the novel. In the former the recognitions, while still interconnected, are in a different relation to the narrative's ethical concerns. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set in the decade of 1960, covering the years before the Nigerian Civil War, as well as and primarily (giving more than half of its space to a third of the decade), the years of the war itself. As such, the ethics of the novel are immediately cast, at least partially, in terms of remembrance. What makes *Half of a Yellow Sun* interesting is that the ethical recognitions that occur in it are often not to do with the war at all. Instead, the narrative foregrounds the everyday, particularly the romantic, details of the characters' lives, and it is along this axis that many of the recognitions take place. Nevertheless, the narrative makes a poignant, ethical remembrance of the Biafran war. It is precisely in the interplay between the war and the everyday, and the way in which the recognitions in the novel are folded into it, that I locate the novel's ethics.

Also of significance is the role played by the emotive aspects of the novel. In my discussion of *Purple Hibiscus* I commented on the function of the emotions in bringing about some of Kambili's recognitions and in highlighting the tragic ambiguity of Eugene. This will be of great importance in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, primarily due to the form which Adichie utilises, namely, the romantic novel that, together with works that (ethically) remember horrors of the past, emphasises the importance

of the emotions. I will discuss *Half of a Yellow Sun* on a more general level, sketching the combination of genres in the narrative and the interplay between them and the remembrance of the war. In turning to the details of the recognitions themselves, which mostly follow the personal relationships and crises, I will map the ethical sense that emerges and, linking back to *Purple Hibiscus*, how different belief systems intersect with this. This will return us to the ethics of remembrance, and I will close with a consideration of how the ethical sense is shaped by the recognitions in the novel.

A number of the novels that represent the Nigerian Civil War have tended to focus on its horrors and injustices. For instance, Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand* (1980), narrated by the Igbo journalist Isaac Chike, emphasises the slaughter of innocent victims: the war is genocide in the name of unity, sponsored and caused by Britain and the west. Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (1986) is similar. Also narrated by a journalist, one Osime Iyere, it likewise emphasises the brutality of the war – though in this account both sides are committing horrors (an acknowledgement that we also find in Adichie), and those who are to blame are the Nigerian elite, again on both sides. They are the source of the lies and manipulations that caused the pogroms in the first place, and they are the ones that profit from the mutual slaughter of tribes where before there was friendship and brotherhood. I am not here going to get into the details of these novels. I mention them to mark the fact that Adichie is less concerned with portraying the horrific violence of the war than some previous representations of it. There is precedence, however, for the kind of novel that Adichie has written. In her acknowledgments, she notes Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) and Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) as “indispensable in creating the mood of middle-class Biafra” (p. 435). As this implies, both of these novels approach the war more obliquely, as Adichie does, with a corresponding shift away from a preoccupation with the violence. Nevertheless, *Sunset at Dawn* still focuses on the violence, particularly the unrelenting bombing of non-combatants. Flora Nwapa's novella on the other hand is quite distinctive, especially among the early civil war novels, in representing almost no direct violence at all, and through this creating a remarkably poignant sense of the fear and perpetual threat of violence that pervaded civilian life during the war.

It is this aspect of her heritage on which Adichie draws in limiting the amount of violence in the narrative. Discussing the novel, John C. Hawley remarks that it is one “that some might criticize as too heavily laden with love stories and with comparatively little gore” (Hawley, 2008, p. 21). Interestingly, these scenes of violence come under criticism for the opposite reason to what Hawley imagined. Brenda Cooper (2008) argues that the intense clarity of the portrayals of violence plays into the stereotypical tropes of Africa as brutal and violent, “add[ing] to the archive of negative images” (p. 139). She asks of these scenes, “when families are butchered and cut up in the novel, when good men participate in gang rape... what is added to our knowledge of Africa” (p. 139)? While I think that Adichie does, perhaps, run a risk of reinforcing a negative view of Africa, it seems that Cooper is asking a misleading question here. If we ask, instead, what these scenes of violence add to our knowledge of the Biafran war, the implied answer is quite different. While it is possible to write a story of the war without any violent details, as Flora Nwapa did (though it is doubtful whether it is possible in a work of greater length), there is an ethical basis for not doing so: it is important to remember those who were brutalised (Kearney, 1999). Cooper has up until this point been engaged in analysing the excellent use to which Adichie puts her “richly depicted” (p. 134) details of everyday life – in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Rather than, as Cooper argues, this characteristic feature of Adichie’s writing getting “hijacked by being sucked into the tropes of dominant discourse” (p. 134), it seems that what occurs is that the texture of description remains constant across scenes both of violence and of the non-violent every day. The rich, detailed and sensuous descriptions, which Cooper admires, are unflinchingly continued into the more unpleasant moments in the narrative, making them more traumatic. The result, as Dennis Walder (2011) argues in his discussion of Cooper’s reading, is that the details “provide the novel with a sense of *witnessing* what has happened, rather than merely remembering or recording it” (p. 134). The few (and there are, as I have emphasised, comparatively few) representations of violence that are included in the novel are therefore an ethical (and necessary) remembrance of the violence of the war.

That there is “comparatively little gore” in the novel is due to the use of a limited, extra-diegetic narrator, coupled with the fact that none of the focalisers (except for Ugwu towards the end) is directly involved with the fighting. The use of a limited perspective, Hugh Hodges (2009) observes, is important as it creates a persuasive sense of the human scale of the conflict: “we learn only as much about Nigerian air raids on Umuahia (or the uses of traditional magic in modern Nigeria, or the starvation caused by Nigeria’s blockade of Biafra) as we can by observing characters experiencing them” (p. 8). To have utilised an omniscient narrator that provides the reader with facts far beyond the characters’ knowledge (as in, for instance, Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* (1982)) would shift the focus onto the events of the war and away from the particular experience of living through them. Through the limited narrator, Adichie foregrounds the lives of the characters as they live through the run up to, and the difficulties of, the conflict – only bringing into focus suffering and ethical challenges as they are individually experienced. As my discussion of the violence in the novel suggests, Adichie’s focus on the characters’ lives rather than the events of the war does not relegate the war to a static backdrop. Hodges notes that unlike a few other civil war novels – his example is Kalu Okpi’s *Biafra Testament* (1982), a civil war novel in the form of a spy/war thriller with scenes that could be transposed into any other spy/war thriller context – the war in *Half of a Yellow Sun* has a profound effect on the characters’ lives and senses of self (2009, p. 7). In the words of Hawley, it is “a vortex that threatens to pull [Adichie’s] characters to pieces” (2008, p. 23).²⁹

Adichie’s characters are primarily involved in a number of “love stories”, which occupies much of the novel, and through which most of the recognitions occur. Before considering them in detail it will be useful to discuss at a more general level the interaction between the romantic lives of the characters and the war. The narrative is divided into chronologically disordered parts (“early sixties,” “late sixties,” “early sixties,” “late sixties”) with the result that the first section dealing with the events of the war (part two: the late sixties) introduces the reader to an unexplained baby. It is also scattered with references to a resolved relationship crisis about which the reader only learns the details in the

²⁹ See also Adichie’s comments on this in an interview for the Boston Globe (Mundow, 2006).

next section. The result is that within the narration of the devastating, haunting events of the massacres of the Igbo, the mass migration south, the secession and the early stages of the war, a curiosity about the characters' relationships before the war is kept alive. The narrative shifts to this moment of crisis in part three and then returns, in part four, to the years of the war. Commenting on this structure in an interview, Adichie remarked that she "wanted [the reader] to remember the times when life was fairly peaceful and all these characters had to worry about was who was sleeping with whom" (Mundow, 2006). This jumping backwards and forwards in time has more than this one effect, however. In part two, the references to an unspecified relationship crisis keeps the peaceful times in the reader's mind, which is, certainly, reinforced by interrupting the war narrative by turning the clock back in part three. But it also results in the peaceful times that we read about in part three being haunted by the gruesome fate that, we know, will meet some of the characters, and has already been met by them in part two. As Cooper comments, "when we observe characters involved in the minutiae of their daily lives before the war, characters who we have already seen brutally massacred during the war, the meaning of the everyday within its supposed ordinariness is de-familiarised" (2008, pp. 134-135). The characters' lives while at peace and while at war are thus tightly interwoven and this double effect, of the concerns of peacetime shadowing the time of war and the horrors of war haunting the concerns of peacetime, creates a poignant sense of the human cost of the war. Both the limited narrator and the non-linear structure of the novel are, in these ways, crucial to the sense of the war that is conveyed. As I turn now to the relationship plots and their recognitions, this double influence of war on life and life on war will be of continued significance, though the war itself will momentarily drop from view as most of the recognitions occur in the years preceding it. Its implications will be seen again though in one of the more important recognitions towards the end of the novel.

The web of relationships is introduced to us in part one through the three focalisers. The first is Ugwu, a young boy who moves to Nsukka from his village to work as a houseboy in Odenigbo's home. Through Ugwu we learn that Odenigbo, who is a professor of mathematics at the university, is in a

relationship with Olanna, the second focaliser and the daughter of the very wealthy Chief Ozobia. Olanna moves to Nsukka to take up a lectureship at the university and to live with Odenigbo. Through Olanna we meet Kainene, her maternal twin sister who, in part one, begins what is to be a serious relationship with Richard, the third focaliser and a white Englishman who has recently moved to Nigeria. Ugwu, who is connected to the main characters by loyalty and dependence, develops, later in the novel, the beginnings of a serious interest in a young woman whom he meets during the war; however she comes to be one of the war's many victims. When part one comes to a close, we are familiar with these five main characters in an apparently stable web of interconnection.

The crisis in these relationships begins with Olanna's recognition of Odenigbo's infidelity. Part Three opens with Olanna spending some time away from Nsukka in London. While she is away, Odenigbo's mother visits from the village for a couple of days with a young woman, Amala, in tow. The details of both this, her second, visit and her earlier one are important and I will consider them below. What I want to note now is that during this first substantial absence of Olanna from Nsukka, Odenigbo betrays her and sleeps with Amala. Unaware, Olanna returns to Nsukka the morning after, meets Odenigbo's mother and Amala as they are leaving, and begins to notice signs that everything is not as it should be. The first indication is Odenigbo's greeting: when they hugged, "his body did not relax against her and the brief press of his lips felt papery" (p. 222). Olanna becomes concerned, when she notices how strangely Odenigbo passes the car key to Amala.

She took it carefully from his fingers; but they did not touch each other. It was a tiny moment, brief and fleeting, but Olanna noticed how scrupulously they avoided any contact, any touch of skin, as if they were united by a common knowledge so monumental that they were determined not to be united by anything else. (p. 223)

Bothered by her observation, but unsure of what it means, she waits with a "racing heart" and "shrivelling stomach" for Odenigbo to return from taking Amala and his mother to the motor park. Upon his return, she comments that she was not expecting to have seen Amala there with his mother. Odenigbo's reply is simply "Yes", but his body language sparks Olanna's recognition of what has happened.

He began to rearrange the newspapers, avoiding her eyes. And, slowly, shock spread over Olanna. She knew. She knew from the jerky movements he made, from the panic on his face, from the hasty way he was trying to look normal again, that something that should not have happened had happened. 'You touched Amala,' Olanna said. (p. 224)

The signs of Odenigbo's body language lead Olanna to recognise his state of mind and the event to which it is causally linked.

Olanna's recognition of Odenigbo's betrayal is a pivotal scene in the novel, resulting in a number of significant repercussions and marking a turning point in the narrative. The initial consequences relate to the action of the plot. The first, and most immediate, is that Olanna leaves Odenigbo, moving into the flat which she had originally purchased for her move to Nsukka, uncertain if they will reconcile. Additionally, her relationship with Ugwu is strained since he knew what had transpired but failed to reveal it to her. As the weeks pass, and Odenigbo makes repeated unsuccessful attempts to convince Olanna to return to him the next consequence unfolds. She learns from Odenigbo that Amala is pregnant with his child. Olanna is shocked and distraught that not only is Amala carrying Odenigbo's child, but that she became pregnant after only one night with him, while she herself, after months of trying, was unsuccessful. It is an important moment as Odenigbo's mother's vehement refusal of his suggestion of an abortion makes him realise that she had "planned this from the beginning" (pp. 231-232). Olanna refuses to allow him to position himself as a victim though, and asks him to leave her flat. Later that same day she sleeps with Richard, her sister's lover.

These consequences have their own additional ones. But before we learn of them, we observe two further results, the epistemological corollaries of the unfolding material consequences, of Odenigbo's betrayal. Both occur after Olanna has slept with Richard. Sex with Richard was a redeeming and rejuvenating experience for her, and it is not long after that she begins to sleep with Odenigbo once more, though she does not yet move back into his house. After their second time together, Odenigbo asks her to marry him. She reacts, either to "his smug tone or the flagrant way he continued to sidestep responsibility and blame his mother," and tells him that she slept with Richard (p. 244). Odenigbo is incredulous and, seeing this, Olanna has a sorrowful moment of recognition. "She sat up

and realized that distrust would always lie between them, that disbelief would always be an option for them” (p. 244). She recognises here a fundamental change in their relationship; that even if they reunite, things have been permanently altered. And it is a recognition that is proved later in the novel when, during the war, Olanna begins to wonder whether Odenigbo has again cheated on her.

The morning after Olanna’s revelation to Odenigbo of her affair with Richard, her African-American neighbour Edna knocks loudly on her door and “came in crying, her eyes swollen red, to tell her that white people had bombed the black Baptist church in her hometown. Four little girls had died. One of them was her niece’s schoolmate” (pp. 244-245). Edna’s raw grief makes Olanna “feel helpless, brought up the urge to stretch her hand into the past and reverse history”, and leads to one of the most significant recognitions of the novel. Edna falls asleep and Olanna,

sat thinking about how a single act could reverberate over time and space and leave stains that could never be washed off. She thought about how ephemeral life was, about not choosing misery. She would move back to Odenigbo’s house. (p. 245)

Brought about by Edna’s grief and her own reflections, the events and recognitions of the past weeks coalesce into the ethical knowledge which Olanna here realises: the irrevocability of actions and their consequences, and the transitory nature of life. This is one of the main ethical thrusts of the novel, such that the importance of Edna’s grief for Olanna’s recognition foreshadows a similar role played by the civil war at a later moment, when the horrors of the conflict leads Kainene to realise a related point. The truth of this realisation continues to play out in the last movements of part three. Amala gives birth to a girl who is rejected by both Amala, whom Ugwu witnessed trying to get rid of the child, and Odenigbo’s mother, who wanted a grandson and has no interest in a granddaughter. Unexpectedly, Olanna proposes that she and Odenigbo raise the child, which they do, and for a time it appears as if the web of relationships has retuned, with a few changes, to its former equilibrium. Kainene’s discovery that Richard and Olanna slept together, however, is the final event in the sequence of consequences set off by Odenigbo’s infidelity, and part three ends with Kainene and Olanna no longer speaking, for Kainene finds her sister’s betrayal “unforgivable” (p. 254).

I will return to Kainene's feelings about her sister's betrayal when I consider her recognition towards the end of the novel. I first want to consider a theme that intersects with these recognitions and which links back to *Purple Hibiscus*: the relation between belief systems. Before Olanna's recognition of Odenigbo's infidelity there is an important one by Ugwu: Odenigbo's mother has used witchcraft, bad medicine, to cause Odenigbo to cheat. Ugwu's suspicions begin with Odenigbo's mother's first visit, Amala in tow. Olanna, who has not met her before, greets them in a genial and friendly way only to be met by a hostile response. Odenigbo's mother almost immediately accuses her of not suckling at her mother's breasts, calling her abnormal and demanding that she go back to her fellow witches and tell them that she did not find her son. Shocked,

Olanna stared at her. Master's mother's voice rose... 'Did you hear me? Tell them that nobody's medicine will work on my son. He will not marry an abnormal woman, unless you kill me first. Only over my dead body!' Master's mother clapped her hands, then hooted and slapped her palm across her mouth so that the sound echoed. (p. 97)

Olanna tries to placate her, but she only becomes louder: "She opened the back door and went outside and shouted. 'Neighbours! There is a witch in my son's house! Neighbours!' Her voice was shrill" (p. 97). Stunned, Olanna leaves for her flat. Once she is gone, Odenigbo's mother starts chattering about the evils of women studying too much, about how unnatural it is for a woman not to be breastfed by her mother, and how no-one knows if Olanna can even bear children. Ugwu is, of course, shocked himself and understandably non-committal. But he becomes afraid when Odenigbo's mother starts talking about going to the *dibia*, the witchdoctor. 'He knew many stories of people who had used medicine from the *dibia*... Perhaps Master's mother would tie up Olanna's womb or cripple her or, most frightening of all, kill her" (p. 98). From that point, Ugwu is on the lookout for anything suspicious which might indicate the presence of medicine being used against either Odenigbo or Olanna.

He therefore begins to notice some strange occurrences, signs of bad medicine. Shortly after Odenigbo's mother's first visit a black cat appears in the back garden. When Odenigbo's mother visits again in part three, the signs proliferate. Ugwu notices that she puts a mysterious powder into

Odenigbo's food from a black packet, claiming it is a spice. He also spots her rubbing a lotion onto Amala, but "there was something wrong about the way Mama's hands were moving in circular motions, slowly, as if in consonance with some ritual" (p. 216). And there is a strange swarming of flies in the kitchen that suddenly disappears. Ugwu recognises from these tokens of recognition that there is bad medicine at work and tries to warn Olanna and Odenigbo: Olanna after he sees the cat, and Odenigbo after seeing the flies. Both of them are dismissive of the idea of witchcraft and give rational explanations for the phenomena, causing Ugwu to doubt what he thought he recognised. That night, however, Odenigbo sexually betrays Olanna, and Ugwu is convinced that "Mama's medicine had done this" (p. 216).

Ugwu's recognition of bad medicine, and the traditional belief system that it represents, is discussed by Olanna and Odenigbo after each visit of Odenigbo's mother. When Odenigbo comes to Olanna's flat after she was accused of being a witch, he explains his mother's actions as relics from an old world, unsuited to the new:

Do you know what a small bush village [she lives in]? Of course she will feel threatened by an educated woman living with her son. Of course you have to be a witch. That is the only way she can understand it. The real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to *negotiate* this new world. (p. 101)

Odenigbo's view of the insufficiency of the traditional understanding of the world, the only one the uneducated have available to them, recurs when Olanna relates to him that Ugwu believes his infidelity is due to bad medicine. Odenigbo comments, neglecting the fact that Ugwu suspected bad medicine at work before the infidelity occurred, "I suppose it's the only way he can make sense of it" (p. 253). Olanna agrees and goes on to point out that it is irrational since if the pregnancy was the result of the medicine then the child should have been a boy and not the girl that was disowned by both her mother and grandmother. Interestingly, though, when Odenigbo replies that it is '[n]o more irrational than belief in a Christian God you cannot see' (p. 253), Olanna disagrees. Accustomed to his jokes about her "social-service faith", she would usually have responded with her standard cynicism "that she was not even sure she believed in a Christian God that could not be seen. But now, with a

helpless human being lying in the cot, one so dependent on others that her very existence had to be proof of a higher goodness, things had changed. 'I do believe', she said. 'I believe in a good God'" (p. 253). In response Odenigbo states that he does not believe in any god at all, only love.

It appears then that in *Half of a Yellow Sun* traditional belief is given no more than psychological credence, and is indeed a hindrance: it is a marker of lacking the tools to navigate the postcolonial world. Odenigbo himself argues for precisely this during the war. As part of his "win the war effort", he travels to various villages, teaching the inhabitants about the war. After one such visit, "Master was standing, gesturing, talking about the last village he visited, how the people had sacrificed a goat at the shrine of *oyi* to keep the vandals [the Nigerians] away." A friend laughs at the waste of protein in a time of deprivation. Odenigbo, however, does not find it humorous and replies, "No, no, you must never underestimate the psychological importance of such things. We never ask them to eat the goat instead" (p. 284). Christianity, in contrast to *Purple Hibiscus*, is mentioned only in passing (though some priests are of limited significance, both for the worse and the better), and is not subjected to the same kind of interrogation as in the previous novel. Indeed, the portrayal of the relationship between the three different belief systems that are present in this one household – traditional, Christian and atheistic – appears to be one of tolerance and co-existence.

Odenigbo's understanding of traditional belief is complicated by two factors. On the one hand, there is the interesting consideration that the traditional perspective of Ugwu, his recognition of bad medicine at work, was actually correct. While it is never stated, it seems very likely that considering her belief in witches and the powers of the *dibia*, Odenigbo's mother did indeed use traditional medicine to try and separate Olanna and Odenigbo. Ugwu's warnings were dismissed at Olanna and Odenigbo's own peril. To dismiss "bad medicine" so easily is also to neglect that traditional medicine often has scientific veracity. In this case, one could potentially understand the mysterious powder as an aphrodisiac, which combined with strong drink and fragrant oils on a young woman facilitated temptation.

The most suggestive use of traditional beliefs, though, is at the tragic close of the novel. Kainene goes trading across enemy lines in a desperate (but frequently done) attempt to obtain supplies for the refugee camp. She disappears and is never heard from again. Olanna and Richard are absolutely shattered by the loss. Richard's thread of the narrative comes to a close with his recognition "that he would never see Kainene again and that his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadow, only in half glimpses" (p. 430). Olanna, in desperation, consults a *dibia* who assures her that he can bring Kainene back. After providing the goat, and doing all else that the *dibia* requires, Kainene still does not appear. Olanna fears she did something wrong, to which Odenigbo replies, "The war has ended but hunger has not, *nkem*. That *dibia* was just hungry for goat meat. You can't believe in that." Her reply is that she "will believe in anything that will bring my sister home" (p. 433). Yet Olanna's narrative thread, and the novel, ends on the same acknowledgement as Richard's, as she turns to the only belief that now gives her comfort.

'We come back again,' she said. 'What?' 'Our people say that we all reincarnate, don't they?' she said. '*Uwa m, uwa ozo*. When I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my sister.' She had started to cry softly. Odenigbo took her in his arms. (p. 433)

It is suggestive that having earlier realised her belief in a good, ostensibly Christian, God, Olanna turns for hope not to the Christian belief in the afterlife but rather to the Igbo belief in reincarnation – a belief that she had previously discredited (p. 253). While the effectiveness of traditional beliefs does not entirely escape the framing of psychological credence (as could be the case with any belief), in negotiating the tragedies of the postcolonial world the novel presents the possibility that they may be more psychologically or emotionally effective than Odenigbo or Olanna originally thought.

While the interactions between atheism, Christianity and traditionalism is in this way suggestive, the main ethical concern in the novel as regards belief is the interaction between the Muslim north and the Christian east. One of the major fault lines in Nigeria, it corresponds largely with the tribal and geographic ones along which the civil war occurred. The concern here is mainly essentialism, and links to the ethical challenge present in all remembrances of suffering to resist the pull towards hatred and revenge. In the first section of the novel, we are introduced to a branch of Olanna's extended family.

Significantly poorer than her own, they live in Kano in northern Nigeria where their home provides a frequently needed refuge for Olanna, a place of “lucid peace” (p. 39). However, they are brutally murdered during the massacres (the scene of which is the main focus of Cooper’s criticism of Adichie’s representation of violence) and the shock leaves Olanna physically paralysed for some time. Present in the north when it happens, Olanna herself only survives because her ex-boyfriend, a Muslim Hausa, helps her to escape. Given this history, she is very surprised when, much later during the war, Odenigbo gets annoyed over her concern that Mohammed “must be so upset about all this [the war]”; he rebukes her for “saying that a bloody Muslim Hausa man is upset”. Incredulously she asks if he is joking, to which he replies, “Am I joking? How can you sound this way after seeing what they did in Kano? Can you imagine what must have happened to Arize [Olanna’s cousin]? They raped pregnant women before they cut them up!” (p. 191). Olanna is furious and sickened, “recoiling” from Odenigbo. “She could not believe he had brought Arize up like that, *cheapened Arize’s memory in order to make a point* in a spurious argument” (p. 191, emphasis mine). This is an important moment. Although the narrative as a whole positions itself in favour of the secession as a response to the massacres and as a correct response to the memory of lost loved ones, this interchange between Olanna and Odenigbo makes two valuable points. First, the blanket condemnation of social groups as complicit or guilty is problematic and inaccurate: many of the Hausa helped the Igbo escape the pogroms. More significantly though, we see the idea that to enlist the memory of lost loved ones to unworthy ends – in this case unqualified hatred of those with whom they are at war – is to cheapen their memory.

Adichie’s concern to resist and problematise essentialism in this way can also be seen in her short story ‘A Private Experience’ (2009b). Only a dozen pages long, the story narrates an evening spent in Northern Nigeria by Chika, hiding in an abandoned shop. There is a riot in progress, and she is led to the safety of the shop by a woman, an onion seller in the market. We never learn her name, though we do learn the completely different worlds that she and Chika inhabit. Chika is Igbo, Christian, rich and educated (training to be doctor), while the trader is Hausa, Muslim, poor and largely uneducated.

Unknown to the two women, while they are speaking “Hausa Muslims are hacking down Igbo Christians with machetes, clubbing them with stones” (p. 44). Yet despite their differences, the violence of the riot leads them to share a common anxiety about their family members from whom they are separated – Chika from her sister Nnedi, the trader from her daughter Halima. And in the course of the evening they share a little of their lives with each other, the trader prays and cries for her daughter, and Chika examines the trader’s nipples which are burning. Through a series of prolepses we learn that the cause of the violence was an Igbo accidentally standing on a Koran, and that Chika will never find her sister. As the evening, and the story, comes to an end, the narrator informs us that “[l]ater, Chika will read in *The Guardian* that ‘the reactionary Hausa-speaking Muslims in the North have a history of violence against non-Muslims’” (p. 55). This description, which lends itself to essentialism, is immediately qualified as the narrator continues: “and in the middle of her grief [for her sister], she will stop to remember that she examined the nipples and experienced the gentleness of a woman who is Hausa and Muslim” (p. 55). In the midst of representing grief, we see a resistance to the enlistment of the memories of lost loved ones to essentialising ends.

Despite her political positioning in relation to both the war and this (possibly fictitious) riot in the short story, Adichie makes the important ethical move of rejecting the temptation towards essentialism and hatred. It is also important to note the accuracy of Adichie’s representation of the conflict. Richard Kearney argues that there are multiple ethical challenges that confront works of remembrance. On the one hand there is the requirement to remember accurately while, on the other, the requirement not to succumb to hatred or a desire for revenge. When we add the consideration of the right of the artist to produce works of creative imagination, the difficulty of navigating a path becomes apparent (1999, p. 18).³⁰ Adichie acknowledges these tensions when she comments that

to write about a war, especially one central to the history of one’s country, is to be constantly aware of a responsibility to something larger than art. While writing *Half of a Yellow Sun*, I enjoyed playing with minor things.... Yet I did not play with the central events of that time. I

³⁰ See also Kearney (2002a).

could not let a character be changed by anything that had not actually happened. (2007b, p. 11)

Adichie gives greatest weight, as perhaps she should, to the ethical requirement of accuracy. And indeed this bears up under scrutiny. The fall of the three most important towns for the characters – Nsukka, Port Harcourt, and Umuahia – are kept in their historical order; the speeches in the novel – most importantly three by the Biafran head of state Lieutenant–Colonel Ojukwu (the Declaration of the Republic of Biafra (pp. 161-162), the Ahiara Declaration (p. 386) and his speech before leaving the country (p. 407)) and Lieutenant-Colonel Efiog’s announcement of Biafra’s surrender (p. 411) – are extracts from the actual speeches; and the Caritas refugee centre in Orlu, which becomes Kainene’s personal cause and obsession and for which she, fatefully, goes cross-border trading, actually existed. It seems, in fact, that the largest event of the war which Adichie altered is when “the miracle of Abagana” (p. 332) occurs. In the novel the “miracle” is after the fall of Port Harcourt, while in reality it was before. Adichie comments, accurately I think, “I’ll hear from people who are displeased by certain things. But they won’t be able to say that I lied. I’m sure people will be upset, but it will be ideological” (Mundow, 2006).

Adichie can, then, be seen to have constructed a narrative of remembrance that is admirably faithful to the numerous ethical demands that are exerted on such a work. Kearney argues further, however, that in a manner similar to the Greeks’ remembrance of their heroes, so too “the horror of moral evil must be retrieved from oblivion by means of narrative memory” (p. 28). Discussing the Holocaust, and particularly Lanzmann’s critique of Spielberg’s movie *Schindler’s List*, Kearney details Lanzmann’s argument (an argument that we will have reason to take up again in the next chapter) that the horror of the holocaust is “uncommunicable” and that to represent it in traditional narrative or cinematic form is to commit “the most serious transgression” (cited in 1999, p. 28). Kearney argues that while Lanzmann’s austere, non-representational approach is very important, its shortcoming is its neglect of the need for the “reminiscence of suffering... to be *felt*... Historical horror requires to be served by an aesthetic... quite as powerful and moving as historical triumph – perhaps even *more* powerful if it is to

compete for the attention of the public at large” (p. 30). And it is in this regard, as I intimated at the start of this section, that the romance narratives and their accompanying recognitions in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are important.

I have already discussed something of the interplay between the war and these romantic narratives, their effect of conveying the human scale and cost of the war. I want to return to that now, picking up the thread which I left at Kainene’s understanding of Olanna’s betrayal as unforgivable. In part four of the novel, well into the war, the sisters are eventually reconciled and begin to repair their relationship. At the start of this process, Kainene makes a crucial observation: “There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable” (p. 347). While not a moment of recognition in itself, as this comment comes after an extended exposure to the horrors of the war Kainene reveals a newfound ethical knowledge, and echoes Olanna’s recognition of the irrevocability of actions and the transitory nature of life. The moment’s significance is double, however, being also a poignant instance of the mutual contamination of war and life. On the one hand, this is a scaling of the horror and cost of the war. An unforgivable betrayal of trust, the genesis and consequences of which have been portrayed in detail, is dwarfed into a forgivable size by the sheer atrocity of the war: a violation which the reader is more easily able to comprehend becomes the yardstick by which the war is measured.

On the other hand, however, this very scaling serves to reinforce the serious, irrevocable nature of Olanna’s betrayal. That this is so becomes apparent when we consider an important difference between Kainene’s and Olanna’s understanding of ethics – and particularly Olanna’s infidelity with Richard. Immediately after sleeping with Richard, the narrator tells us that Olanna “felt filled with a sense of wellbeing, with something close to grace” (p. 234). The significance of this is expanded for us as Olanna later thinks about her disclosure of her affair to Odenigbo:

She should not have told him about Richard. Or she should have told him more: that she regretted betraying Kainene and him but did not regret the act itself. She should have said that it was not a crude revenge, or a score-keeping, but took on a redemptive significance for her. She should have said the selfishness had liberated her. (p. 244)

There are two elements at play against each other here: Olanna's sense of duty, with her corresponding failure in it, to Kainene and Odenigbo and her sense of duty to herself. And it is the latter that can be seen to govern her understanding of the event, outweighing the violation of trusts, even that of her sister. Only when Kainene discovers what occurred, and severs all communication with Olanna, does she come to the full sense of her betrayal. Kainene's response, though, is in synchrony with her understanding of ethics. Throughout the novel she places her responsibility to other people as a priority. It is precisely this that leads, in part, to her intense involvement with the refugee camp and to her fatal attempt to trade across enemy lines in a desperate measure to provide it with urgently needed supplies. That it takes something as horrendous as the civil war to make Olanna's betrayal forgivable reinforces how serious, and irrevocable, the offense was. This moment in which Kainene says that the offense has in fact become forgivable therefore echoes Olanna's own earlier recognition of the concatenating power of a single action.

That the war is crucial for this reconciliation between the sisters takes us to the final mutual contamination of war and everyday life: the affective impact of the characters' narratives. By the close of the novel the reader has followed the convolutions of the relationship between Kainene, Richard, Olanna and Odenigbo. And for this reason, when Kainene goes missing while trading across enemy lines it is one of the most moving losses of the narrative, upon which the novel closes. The involvement that the narrative has invested in the web of relationships serves a larger purpose than the romance plots. To come back to Hawley's imagined critics, rather than being "too heavily laden with love stories and with comparatively little gore" (2008, p. 21), it is precisely the limited narrative perspective intertwined with the affective involvement and scaling effect of the web of relationships that makes *Half of a Yellow Sun* an effective, emotionally powerful, remembrance of the Nigeria-Biafra war. And it is here that the recognition is again caught up in the folding into each other of war and everyday life. The close link between the war and Kainene's recognition effects a broadening of the recognition's predicate to include the war: it is the unchangeable, gruesome reality of the war that changes what is forgivable, and which leaves Olanna and Richard grieving the loss of Kainene. In

this way the novel becomes a remembrance that manages to turn the war into a shaping force for the ethical recognition of the power of “a single act [to] reverberate over time and space and leave stains that could never be washed off” (p. 245), and by the same move folds this recognition back onto the war such that the “single act” comes also to designate the war itself.

V

A number of points have emerged in this analysis of Adichie’s two novels. In *Purple Hibiscus* I traced the ethical move that Kambili makes as she comes to the knowledge that her father’s form of Catholicism is oppressive and intolerant. Although the novel presents an inculturated Catholicism as a viable, and desirable, ethical framework, I also noted that matters are not so clear-cut as a simple ethical rejection of a particular (colonial) form of Christianity. Kambili’s father is indeed intolerant and abusive. Yet simultaneously, he is dearly loved by his daughter (though at the end she is ashamed to admit it) and is fearless in the use of his newspaper to fight for democracy in an authoritarian Nigeria. Moreover, the Catholicism which is rejected in the novel was crucial in educating Eugene and Ifeoma, and thus made possible his resistance to the government and her further education in the academy and her inculturated Catholicism. In addition to an ethical intervention in some of the debates around Christianity in Africa, there are therefore two ethical concerns that I have drawn out. In the first instance, we can see Eugene as something of a tragic figure. His Catholicism, although rejected, is both ethically valuable and abhorrent, inspiring both his abuse and his political interventions. The movement to an inculturated Catholicism enacted in the novel is, as it were, the salvaging of that which is beneficial. This does not however result in the elimination of the layering of the ethical value of Eugene’s colonial Catholicism. The two ethical judgements of Eugene are maintained in a tension similar to what I analysed in *The Hungry Tide*.

It is here that the productivity of the proximity between radical evil and the tragic instance of an action being both good and bad becomes clear. Radical evil, as I have detailed in my introduction, is the idea that for an action to be good there must be a “necessary possibility” of it being abhorrent.

This does not, of course, mean an acceptance of all that is ethically unacceptable. To recall Geoffrey Bennington's phrasing in his discussion of ethics and deconstruction, "The necessary possibility of the worst is a positive condition of the (unconditionally demanded) better. The necessary possibility of what Kant called radical evil is a positive condition of the good" (2000, p. 42). With regard to *Purple Hibiscus*, this refers to the extent to which the religious legacy that is to be rejected is embedded within, and makes possible, the form of that legacy which is to be embraced. Although the novel is firmly positioned in favour of an inculturated Catholicism, the intolerant form remains its antecedent cause and an (ineradicable) future possibility. And at the novel's close we therefore have an ethical intervention into the ethics of relating to difference of belief, coupled with both the always present possibility of intolerance, and the tragic combination of religious intolerance and the fight for political freedom.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* the ethical concern shifts. Approaching the remembrance of the Biafran war through the personal lives and crises of her characters, Adichie draws out the mutual contagion between the war and everyday life. Threading through the novel what might seem an ethical truism – the recognition of the irrevocability of action and consequences – it is given fresh poignancy through being folded into the narration of the war. What is an unforgivable betrayal in more usual everyday life becomes forgivable during the war, creating a powerful sense of its cost and magnitude. The conflict meanwhile injects the ethics of everyday life with a new significance through portraying the horrors that need to occur in order to make such an unforgivable betrayal forgivable. This recognition, in turn, folds back again into the representation of the war. The importance of the war for this knowledge means that the war itself cannot be precluded from its resonance, and at the close of the novel we see the extent to which the "irrevocable act" of the war has irreversibly stained the lives of the characters. That a single act can radiate outwards to affect an entire history is deployed here more explicitly than in Ghosh, and with an important difference. In Ghosh's work, we can see how a single choice is caught up in a complicated sequence of events; how Deeti's recognition of Kalua and her corresponding intervention on his behalf sets in motion their journey to the *Ibis*, where

their presence (and their past) is crucial in the events that occur on board. In Adichie an additional layer is added: we see how a single act can reverberate over time and space, as well as the potential for a single moment to shape the meanings of actions beyond its immediate occurrence. In this case, Olanna's recognition shapes the understanding of both the war and the characters' everyday lives.

Despite the important differences from Ghosh's work, in both context and form, the shape of the ethics that I traced in the previous chapter can also be seen in Adichie's work. Most prominently, the recognitions in the novel retain their significance for delineating its ethical sense. Though the predicates of the recognitions are different, bringing into play a new set of debates, and the relations among them differ from those in Ghosh, their usefulness as a lens through which to approach ethics in the novel remains. Woven into the play of recognitions, we can also note the continued importance of the emotions for the ethics in Adichie's novels, both as a cause of some recognitions and contributing to the ethics' effectiveness. And there is further an element of the tragic shape of ethics that I delineated previously, most clearly seen in the figure of Eugene, a tragic combination of good and evil that Kambili responds to with her combination of love and terror. It is, however, the more nuanced ambiguity that I analysed in Ghosh's use of a common humanity that carries over most effectively. The instability of the idea of a common humanity in Ghosh, the un-erasable possibility of human relations turning to violence, is also seen in the ethically viable form of Catholicism in Adichie, hosting within itself the possibility of that which it rejects. While in *Half of a Yellow Sun* there seems to be a departure from the tragic shape of ethics, the importance of recognitions and the emotions remain. However, the novel's main ethical interest rests in the deployment of these features for the nuanced depiction of the mutual ethical contamination of daily life and war and its effectiveness in conveying an ethics of daily life, as well as the irrevocability of a single act and in remembering the horrors of the past.

Adichie's novels are, therefore, primarily concerned with two of the three ethical themes that structure this thesis: religion and remembrance. It must be noted however that although Adichie does

not thematise the idea of a common humanity, it can still be discerned in her work. This is most notable in the possibility of forming connections across cultural and religious differences. In pointing this out though, it is necessary also to observe that, as I argued in the introduction to the thesis, the recognitions in Adichie's two novels give rise to a recalibrated sense of self, a recalibration that leaves the relation to the other more open than it was previously: Kambili does not in the end possess a comprehensive understanding of her grandfather, only the certainty of his value which her father's Catholicism had rejected. In this openness to the difference of the other we can say that the humanism that underpins Adichie's novels is somewhat similar to what was observed in Ghosh. Caryl Phillips, to whom I now turn, addresses all three ethical themes. As with Adichie, this shift of authors will entail a corresponding change in context. Importantly, turning to Caryl Phillips will enable me to further refine my approach to ethics in the novel through engaging with a different kind of writing: Ghosh and Adichie both write within a more traditional realist mode, using for example the *Bildungsroman* and epic adventure, while Phillips disturbs the generic norms of realism in a number of significant ways.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FAILURE OF RECOGNITION: CARYL PHILLIPS

I

The author of ten novels to date, Phillips' oeuvre presents "a body of work rich in diverse settings, time periods, characters and styles" (Taylor, 2009). Ranging across several centuries and straddling the continents of Africa, North America and Europe (sometimes in the same book, such as *Crossing the River*) Phillips' novels are populated by characters as diverse as a nineteenth-century upper class woman travelling to the Caribbean, a nineteenth-century black missionary in Liberia, American G.I.s in England during the Second World War, and an eighteenth-century slaver Captain, to name but a few of those that will be seen in this chapter. Further, while Phillips' first two novels – *The Final Passage* (1985) and *A State of Independence* (1986) – are for the most part narrated through one central character, his third novel *Higher Ground* (1989) introduces a polyphonic style that has characterised much of his subsequent work. Yet despite this impressive range and diversity there is, in Bénédicte Ledent's words, an "obvious thematic unity" (2002, p. 1), namely, the intersection of questions of identity, race, and migration/exile, each explored as aspects of the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade (Eckstein, 2006; Ledent, 2002).³¹ As such, his works engage with the ethical themes that I have been considering so far, namely, remembrance, the human, and religion. Of his works, *Cambridge* (1991)³² and *Crossing the River* (1993)³³ will constitute the focus of this chapter as they present the most sustained and direct consideration of the slave trade and colonial settlement in the Caribbean and Africa.

Cambridge and *Crossing the River* are also notable for being among the most polyphonic of Phillips' works, consisting of multiple narratives in various voices from different ideological positions.

³¹ Apart from being noted in critical studies of Phillips' work, this thematic unity can also be traced in the comments of reviewers on a number of his novels. See for instance Walter (2003), Taylor (2009), and Boddy (2009).

³² All references point to the 1993 Vintage International edition.

³³ All references point to the 2006 Vintage edition.

Unmediated by an overarching narrator, the multiple narratives leave the reader to negotiate between them, a feature of the works that has often not been kindly reviewed (see Bewes (2006, p. 45)). This contrasts with the more unified narratives that constitute the novels of Adichie and Ghosh that have been considered so far. Importantly this fragmentation of narrative voice alters the functioning of recognition in relation to the novels' ethical sense. While recognitions are at play in particular narratives, the ethical effect of the novels relies on the cumulative impact of the interaction between the narratives, and is consequently more overtly dependent upon the reader than in previous chapters. In other words, the recognition arises from the narrative form of the novels. In the works of Ghosh and Adichie the recognitions of the characters/narrators and the ethical sense of the novel were coextensive. The connection between these aspects now becomes more oblique, though there is still a connection: the novels are carefully crafted to spark particular recognitions in the reader, and an ethical concern that is broached by the texts in this way is precisely the lack, or failure, of recognition in the characters.

Unlike Phillips' later novel, *The Nature of Blood*, in which the narrative threads are interwoven with little more than a line break to mark the alternations between them, in both of the texts considered here the narratives are clearly demarcated and are narrated, uninterrupted, in their entirety. Phillips' narrative strategy in *The Nature of Blood* serves to emphasise the thematic continuities between Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jewish people and sixteenth-century Venice's treatment of both Jewish and African peoples, constituting a poignant exploration of Europe's obsession with blood, that is, with issues of race and identity. In *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* however the effect of the structure is to draw overt attention to the narratives' formal aspects, an attention that yields important results. Rarely narrated extra-diegetically, the narratives are constructed as pieces of autobiography or testament – letters, journals, and final testaments – and their style matches the period and form which they represent. This has been particularly noted in *Cambridge* (Eckstein, 2006; O'Callaghan, 1993). As we saw in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, representing periods of trauma in the history of colonialism and its legacies evokes questions on the ethics of memory. What makes Phillips'

two texts, and particularly *Cambridge*, interesting in this regard is their use of actual historical documents: the accuracy of style in each narrative fragment is reflective of the extensive citation of original documents from the era and genres represented. The result, as Evelyn O’Callaghan has put it, is a “sense of familiarity, of *déjà vu* which the informed reader experiences in *Cambridge*” (1993, p. 43).

O’Callaghan notes three main sources for Emily’s journal, namely “writings by Monk Lewis, Lady Nugent, Mrs. Carmichael *et al*” (p. 36), while for Cambridge’s narrative she notes as the main source *Equiano’s Travels* (p. 38). Lars Eckstein’s (2006) more comprehensive study, to which I will turn in a moment, uncovers a number of other source texts, which includes some historiographic works from the period, in addition to the near exact replication in Part Three of an historical report of the murder of a Mr Brown by a slave Cambridge (presumably, Eckstein comments, “the very historical document that served as [Phillips’] initial inspiration for the novel” (p. 92)). He adds to O’Callaghan’s list of main sources for Emily’s narrative Janet Shaw’s *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, and a number of less cited travelogues by F.W.N. Bayley, Henry Nelson Coleridge, and J.B. Moreton (pp. 75-76); for Cambridge’s narrative he adds James Albert Ukasaw Gronniosaw’s *A Narrative of the Life of James Albert Gronniosaw*, Ottobah Cuguanó’s *Thought and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, and Ignatio Sanchos’ *Letters* (p. 85). The report in Part Three is taken from Mrs. Flannigan’s *Antigua and the Antiguans* (p. 92). However, O’Callaghan’s insights into the novel are not affected by the omission of these additional source texts. Eckstein’s argument is dependent upon detailing the historical citations, which takes up a large part of his chapter on the novel, and includes a detailed Appendix that lists the source fragments for the entire text. For O’Callaghan what needs to be established is simply that “Phillips has gone to great pains to establish the historical ‘authenticity’ of his fiction” (p. 39). The significance of this is twofold. On the one hand, *Cambridge* is able to reveal the web of links and contrasts among the “intersecting peripheries” of the time that Phillips represents: Cambridge, Emily and Christiania are all marginalised to differing extents by the racist patriarchal discourse that shapes their worlds (p. 40). On the other hand, it draws our attention to the links between fictional and

historical narratives, that is, to “the essentially ‘fictional’ nature of these texts, particularly in terms of the way conventional formal structures shape the manner in which the ‘objective’ narrator shapes and judges the ‘facts’” (p. 42). O’Callaghan’s argument is that the novel exposes the fictional quality of history while simultaneously reminding us of the historical character of the story that is told. And in that capacity, it brings two marginal narratives into a productive proximity.

I will take up both of these insights – the limitations on Emily and Cambridge’s discourse, and the productiveness of the proximity of their narratives – in my own analysis of the novel with some important differences. In the first instance though, it should be noted that O’Callaghan’s reading is more historical than ethical: as her title states she is concerned with “Historical Fiction and Fictional History”. It is in Eckstein’s analysis that we approach some of the ethical and political implications of Phillips’ narrative strategy. At one point in her article O’Callaghan comments that “it is important to note that while the reading of *Cambridge* is a disconcertingly echoic experience... there is no sense of a stylistic patchwork. Each of its narratives is relatively consistent and suited to its presumed author” (p. 39). This successful synthesis of numerous stylistically diverse fragments is the focus of Eckstein’s analysis. In order to dissect more rigorously the method behind this success he marks a distinction between “montage” and “pastiche”: “montage” is to be understood as the citation of fragments from earlier works, while “pastiche” is the sustained imitation of the style of the earlier works. Eckstein writes: “the novel is composed of numerous, in most cases slightly modified fragments of older texts (montage); at the same time, these fragments are supplemented and interconnected by passages which merely imitate the source-material stylistically while relying on Phillips’ own imagination (pastiche)” (p. 73). Eckstein proceeds by placing the various source texts alongside the passage which draws on them, enabling him to note the elements of montage as well as to analyse the technique of pastiche deployed in incorporating and connecting them into a coherent narrative. Eckstein’s aim is to defend Phillips from charges of plagiarism by, firstly, demonstrating the “sheer craft and aesthetic brilliance of Phillips’ montage technique”, showing the novel to be an “imaginative performance belying any charge of dull repetition” (p. 75). Once established, in the manner adumbrated above, he

turns, secondly, to consider the “mnemonic functionality and ideological complexity of Phillips’ approach” (p. 75). It is here that Eckstein locates the ethical and political implications of the novel.

Eckstein argues that through his use of montage, Phillips picks a careful path through the debates on the ethics of memory. As with Kearney – and, as will be seen in the final section of this chapter, Bewes – Eckstein draws on the debates surrounding the representation of the Holocaust, and notes three main positions. Two of them I have considered in relation to Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. On one side of the debate is the argument for the exclusive use of personal testimony and reports since narrative imposes a structure of meaning on otherwise meaningless suffering, and thus does an injustice to the memory of those who suffered. On the other side is the argument for the importance of fictional narrative construction precisely because of its shaping effects, that is, in order to personalise and make the effect of the horror on an individual consciousness *felt*, so as to guard against the Holocaust being reduced to impersonal reports and facts which are “too gigantic to be digested or comprehended as such” (pp. 100-103; see also Kearney (1999)). We saw that Adichie, although accurate in the major historical details, came down on the side of making the horror felt, through the skilful deployment of popular narrative form. Phillips’ montage, Eckstein argues, manages to combine these two approaches. Drawing extensively on historical, personal testimonies and reports, Phillips fuses them into a cohesive, fictional whole. In comparison to Adichie’s inclusion in *Half of a Yellow Sun* of actual speeches and events from the Biafran war, Phillips’ form and subject matter (and, probably, intent) enable him to combine these two approaches to the ethics of memory to an extent that Adichie did not. The third approach Eckstein notes is a more strictly formal one: a matching of the narrative form to that which it represents. Citing Glissant’s argument on the necessity for literature from the Antilles to disrupt linear time, Eckstein proposes that the intertextuality of *Cambridge* as such “embodies the ‘explosion’ of formal and temporal unity as Glissant describes it” (p. 104). Beneath the smooth surface of the text, the source fragments leap backwards and forwards through time. Eckstein therefore argues that the novel successfully negotiates three different imperatives of the ethics of memory “without sacrificing any of them” (p. 105).

There is also what Eckstein designates as a political aspect to the montage and pastiche in *Cambridge*. To draw this out he turns to recent theory that “expresses an increasing dichotomisation of the spheres of recollection into ‘memory’ and ‘history’” (p. 108). Memory is understood as recollection that is lived and effective in the present for an individual or collection of individuals who “derive norms and values from it” and deploy it to “negotiate identity” (p. 108). History, on the other hand, has no immediate bearing on life lived in the present, “comprising all those manifestations of memory that are not linked up with any individual or collective agency” (p. 108). The example here is the archive or library. Through extensively citing archival material, Eckstein suggests that Phillips is involved in a work of revitalisation, transforming history into memory (these two spheres are not, he says, categorically opposed but are marked by slippages between them). Eckstein writes: “Throughout the novel, these older texts are resurrected into a communicative sphere of memory where they can be considered afresh in negotiating contemporary norms and values” (p. 109). Phillips’ techniques of montage and pastiche accomplish this through deploying “arresting narrative voices that encourage an *emotional* engagement rather than a merely intellectual one”, an engagement in which readers must negotiate their “own position ideologically” “in relation to that of the ideal readers implied in the older narratives” (p. 109). Eckstein’s political reading of the novel is in this regard closely connected to his reading of Phillips’ negotiation of the ethics of memory, and connects back to Kearney’s argument for the importance of the emotions in negotiating memory and working to prevent the horrors of the past from being repeated.

Despite this success there is a possible ethical difficulty that arises from Phillips’ methodology in *Cambridge*. If Emily and Cambridge’s narratives are constructed from selected citations of earlier works, to what extent are they, as it were, set up by their author to represent specific ideological positions? In other words, is there a sense in which we could say that, due to the process of selective citation of older texts, Emily is the historical worst case scenario with the more ambivalent or positive aspects of the source texts being passed over and omitted? This feeds into a further difficulty that will emerge during my discussion of the discursive constraints that become evident in the characters’

actions: to what extent is Emily responsible for her failure to recognise Cambridge's humanity? These concerns will be addressed in the course of the chapter, but it is important to note that it seems Phillips was not unaware of them. On the one hand, the citations of older texts cover a range of topics, from the more ideological (and offensive) characterisations of slaves, to the more mundane descriptions of the Antilles, the plantation houses, and the process of making sugar. While Emily (and Cambridge) are no doubt ideologically positioned by their author, this is not exclusively due to the selection of citations, which exceeds their ideological positioning. Nevertheless, what will be seen as making Emily a responsible agent is the inclusion of the extra-diegetically narrated prologue and epilogue. The latter, importantly, shows an ethical *change* in Emily, effected through her (previously constrained) friendship with Stella, and which creates more depth in her character.

There is a sense though in which my reading of the novel renders these questions less crucial. My concern is to analyse, through the rubric of recognition, an ethical consideration in the novel that is more immediate than Eckstein's point that the reader of the novel is required to negotiate the ideological gap between the implied reader and themselves. Eckstein notes it in passing. Adding to O'Callaghan's discussion of intersecting peripheries the observation that Emily and Cambridge share an acceptance of "aspects of the colonizer's discourse" (p. 112 see also Ledent (2002)), and pointing out that the novel hosts a dialogical ideological conflict between slave narratives and colonial travelogues (p. 111), he writes: "At no stage in the three parts of the novel do we come across an explicit expression, in all its sordid detail, of the sufferings of the African diaspora, yet this suffering is evoked *ex negativo*, as it were, in the pervasive racism of the British travelogues and histories" (p. 112). The ideological conflict between the narratives, "the massive discrepancies between their accounts and the dehumanizing perspective of the British travellers and historians", Eckstein argues, implies the literal conflict and suffering that resulted from slavery (p. 112). While I do not contest that the immense suffering of slavery is implied in the novel (though I do not think expressions of this suffering are entirely absent), it is my argument that Phillips presents the reader with a positive ethical recognition which is fundamental to both O'Callaghan's intersecting peripheries and Eckstein's

ideological conflict and complicity: a common humanity. It is by means of heightening precisely the lack of such recognition through the proximity of Emily and Cambridge's narratives – as well as showing the traces of a partial recognition in Emily's epilogue – that this is accomplished. As such, this recognition rests in the form of the novel, in the juxtaposition of the narratives, and is to an extent effective regardless of historical veracity so long as Emily is believable, for which the prologue and epilogue are crucial.

This failure of recognition relies on an additional feature of Phillips' use of narrative voice that has yet to be mentioned, and which marks a further difference from the work of Adichie and Ghosh. In an interview with Graham Swift (2009) Phillips comments about his use of the first-person narrator: "It seems to me, at this stage anyhow, that the first person gives me an intimate flexibility which I can't find in the third person" (p. 16). Throughout the thesis I have been detailing how the novel form, namely its focus on particularity and the emotions, shapes its ethical explorations. And as will be seen, these aspects will be further explored in Phillips' novels. What will also emerge though, and which is intimated by Phillips' comment in this interview, is the role of narrative voice. I have noted that the ways in which each of the selected authors organise their texts, and the place of recognition within them, is varied. There is also the further aspect that Phillips' narrators are also mostly unreliable. An unreliable narrator, I suggest, is often characterised by a failure of knowledge, a lack of recognition of which the reader is aware. And what will emerge is that this unreliability, coupled with the narrative fragmentation, enables the most significant ethical difference between Phillips and Ghosh and Adichie: both *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* narrate ethical *failure*. The work of Ghosh and Adichie, with significant differences between them, are organised around a positive gain in knowledge and, as such, dramatise ethical success – gains in ethical knowledge, which correlate to the novels' ethical sense. Phillips on the other hand, although his narratives are frequently narrated as autobiographical, refuses the move of a positive recognition, the overt correction of ignorance and youth, and dramatises instead its failure. I will return to these connections between narrative form and the ethical engagement that it allows further on. Now I turn to an analysis of *Cambridge*

beginning with Emily, “one of the most skilfully created unreliable narrators in contemporary fiction” (Cited in O’Callaghan (p. 44)).

II

As with *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge* is constituted by three main narratives. The longest is the journal of Emily Cartwright, the daughter of a plantation owner, which records the experiences of her journey to the West Indies to visit her father’s plantation. While at the plantation, on a fictional island, she has several encounters with the eponymous Cambridge. Yet despite the disruptive nature of these moments to Emily’s discourse they do not result in an alteration of Emily’s understanding of (racial) difference. It is her relationship with Mr Brown, the manager of the plantation, which will be more significant for this, and which also crystallises the role played by her emotions in bringing her to the semi-recognition which she does, in the end, achieve. The second major narrative in the novel, and much shorter than Emily’s, is the final testament of Cambridge before his execution for the murder of Mr Brown. This narrative can be read as serving as a corrective to Emily’s overtly racist discourse, inverting a number of common stereotypes (Low, 1998, p. 125). Yet it will be seen to be subject to its own limitations and racism. The third, and shortest of the three main narratives, is a report providing a sensationalised (though ostensibly objective) account of the murder of Mr Brown by Cambridge. Peculiar to both *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* among Phillips’ polyphonic novels is the inclusion of a prologue and epilogue. In *Cambridge*, a text which is meticulously written in the style of the historical genres which it represents, it is significant that the prologue and epilogue are written in a modern, free style in which an extra-diegetic narrator first introduces us to Emily Cartwright in the prologue, and then in the epilogue relates the resulting changes to Emily due to her time on the island; both reveal aspects of her character that are elided in her journal.

As this synopsis indicates, the novel, which is named after the slave Cambridge and whom we therefore expect to occupy most of our attention, subverts our expectation in being dominated by the voice and perspective of Emily. The structure of the novel in this way enacts the historical

marginality of Cambridge, and when we hear his voice in his last testament it is mediated and shaped by the colonial discourses that he has internalised through the process of learning to write. This determination by colonial discourse of what is claimed as authentic speech is ubiquitous in the novel – in the narratives of both Cambridge and Emily – and prevents the disruptive effects of Emily’s encounters with Cambridge from culminating in recognition. As Timothy Bewes (2006) writes, Phillips’ text effects the “systematic evacuation of every discursive position that might claim freedom from implication in colonialism” (p. 46). Nevertheless there are significant resonances between the lives of Emily and Cambridge. That these are resonances rather than strict parallels is important. European women’s experiences of patriarchy and marginality in society should not be equated with the violence (both physical and discursive) that characterised slavery - a point which Phillips rightly emphasises in an interview (Jaggi, 1994, p. 27). A number of critics have still argued for several important similarities and resonances which show what we have seen Evelyn O’Callaghan (1993) call, in the words of *The Empire Writes Back*, “intersecting peripheries” (p. 40) (see also Ledent (2002, pp. 100-106). Despite Emily remaining unaware of them until the very end, the presence of these resonances gives the moments at which their lives intersect a particular poignancy, emphasising the very lack of recognition within them. Crucial to Emily’s failure to see the similarities between herself and Cambridge, and the prevention of her interactions with him from giving rise to recognition, is her unreliability as a narrator. It is her dislocation from herself, her unrecognised racism and gullibility, which making her unreliable and also ensure that by the time she first speaks to Cambridge her perspective has become entrenched in the pervading racist ideology of the plantations.

In the prologue, Emily, aboard the ship that is to take her to the West Indies, remembers back to the time when her father brought news of his decision that she travel to his plantation and upon her return marry Thomas Lockwood, “a fifty-year-old widower with three children” who is “ably provided for” (p. 3). Unable to express her feelings about the arrangement, she locks eyes with her father and “listened as her voice unspooled in silence” (p. 4). Unable to speak her mind, the narrator gives us her thoughts in free indirect discourse and we learn that she wishes her father understood her desire for

more than “years of cold fleshiness made intimate only by the occasional brushing of lips against cheek” (p. 4). But all that she sees in his eyes is a “determination to insure his own future” (p. 4) – likely because the wealth of her future husband will help to secure him in the “heavy-pocketed” lifestyle to which we soon learn he has become accustomed (p. 7). The resonances with the observations of slavery that follow, in addition to the position of powerlessness, can be seen in the description of the arrangement as “daughters sacrificed to strangers” and the “rude mechanics of horse trading” (pp. 3, 4). Emily’s journey to the West Indies is therefore understood by her as a flight from a society that restricts and marginalises her sex, symbolised synecdochically through the practise of fastening women “into backboards, corsets and stays to improve [their] posture” (p. 4).

Bénédicte Ledent (2002), in the only book length study on Phillips’ work,³⁴ argues that Emily’s introduction in this way as critical and fleeing the marginalisation of women in English society initially positions her as a reliable narrator, which the opening pages of her journal reinforce (p. 84). In those opening pages we learn that it is Emily’s intention to keep a record of her observations during her travels in order to “better recount for the use of my father what pains and pleasures are endured by those whose labour enables him to continue to indulge himself” (p. 7). Critical of the practise of absentee landlords drawing wealth from their plantations without ever visiting them, her hope is that her “adventuring will encourage Father to accept the increasingly common, though abstract, English belief in the iniquity of slavery” (p. 8). These aspirations, coupled with the uncontroversial factual descriptions of the nautical aspects of her journey, Ledent argues, “inspires the reader with confidence” in her perspective (p. 84). While this is so, the traces of what will soon undermine her reliability are already present in this opening, namely, the degree to which her perspective is determined by the discourses of her home country. She reflects the (gendered) norms of courtesy in being appalled at the Captain’s treatment of her and her companion Isabella, norms which will play

³⁴ It is an insightful study, though I agree with Bewes’ argument (2006, pp. 50-53) that its overarching attempt to argue for an essential “Caribbeanness” that characterises Phillips’ works is problematic. I will return to Bewes’ wider argument – which presents a different understanding of ethics in literature to my own – in the final section of this chapter.

an important role in some of her initial judgements of slaves upon her arrival in the Caribbean. But most revealingly, she couches her objection to her father's absenteeism in the following terms: "There is, I suspect, small virtue in leaving one's creatures to the delegated dominion of some overseer or manager" (p. 7). Her designation of slaves as "one's creatures" reveals a crack of dehumanising racism in her abolitionist façade. Rather than showing, as Ledent suggests, "a critical but balanced view of absentee landlords" (p. 84), this criticism of her father is the first hint that her lament over the "many persons scattered throughout our kingdom who inwardly cling to their old prejudices" (p. 8) foreshadows the revelation of her own prejudice, when she herself begins to defend slavery.³⁵

An aspiration to scientific objectivity can still however be observed here, particularly as characterised by the meticulous cataloguing of her observations. It is an important motif throughout her journal and constitutes one of the main axes around which her unreliability accrues. These first fissures in her objectivity widen upon her arrival in the West Indies. The alien newness of the island is, from her first sight of it, related to the Old World from which she has departed. The shoots of the "infamous sugar cane" "billowed in the wind like fields of green barley" (p. 18), and later en route to the plantation house the fields which are "neatly dressed as though preparing for turnip husbandry as practised in England" are separated by hedges which, in their thorniness, "resemble our hawthorn" (p. 23). While, for Ledent, it is usual for a newcomer to a region to relate what they see back to what is familiar, Emily's descriptions she suggests could be "read as an attempt to 'make order out of chaos', an epitome of Europe's standardisation, then appropriation of the planet" (p. 85). What is more significant in Emily's descriptions is the disclosure of the (not unexpected) shaping of her understanding of the Caribbean by her European perspective. This is again evidenced in Emily's occasional deployment of images from classical antiquity: the house is "at the end of this Arcadian grove" (p. 27), the slaves perform "Sisyphean labours" (p. 77), and they sing "Bacchanalian songs" (p. 87). Peter Hulme (1992) argues this is a common aspect of the discursive construction of the

³⁵ See also Gail Low (1998) who makes a similar observation.

Caribbean, a means by which European colonialists smoothed the “transition from the Old world to the New” (Ledent, p. 86 cf Hulme (1992, p. 35) and Pratt (2008)).

That Emily’s encounter with the strangeness of the Caribbean is negotiated through the categories of Europe in this way is not unusual, though it does begin to circumscribe her perspective and reliability. What undermines it more radically is her lack of self-awareness and her gullibility. While still on board the ship, Emily has her first recorded encounter with an African slave: the pilot who comes aboard to guide them into port. Emily records: “It caused me a little discomfit to hear our captain immediately baptize the pilot with the title, *nigger*, but the pilot seemed somewhat resigned to his appellation” (p. 17). This is consistent with her earlier view of opposition to the slave trade. She revealingly proceeds to note that the sailors “were to a man generally less polished than the negro” (p. 18). Seemingly a passing explanation of the sailors’ respect for the man, it references her earlier adherence to the norms of European dress and behaviour and becomes particularly pertinent when the lack of an approximation to these norms begins to expose the racist ideology that she has, seemingly unbeknown to her, held all along.

Upon reaching the land, Emily is therefore repulsed by what she sees. “I... noted that the negro men wore thin-clothed apparel which left scarce anything to the imagination, and that their women wandered hither and thither barely stirring to cover their bodies” (p. 21). Although she envies the greater comfort such scant attire brings in the intense heat, she is disgusted by the lack of “concern for conventional morality” (p. 21), a phrase which again exposes her eurocentrism. In addition to considering the slaves immoral, and in contrast to the “noble English horses” that pull the carriage, we quickly learn that the curiosity exhibited for her arrival is a “savage curiosity” (p. 22). What is most striking, particularly for the short time of the journey from the docks to her father’s plantation, is that she mistakes for a “parcel of monkeys” some African children, naked and “parading around in a feral manner to which they were not only accustomed, but in which they felt comfortable” (pp. 23-24). Interestingly this is one of Phillip’s citations of an older text, in this case Janet Schaw’s *Journal of a*

Lady of Quality (Eckstein, 2006, p. 245). In a remarkably short time, then, slaves have gone from suffering the appellation of “nigger” to being immoral, savage, and contentedly animalistic.

The ease with which she views the slaves as immoral savages goes some way to explaining the readiness with which she a moment later uncritically accepts the racist ideology of her escort from the docks, the plantation’s book-keeper. After her misrecognition of the children, Emily tells us that “I expressed my general concern at the blackness of the native people”, which elicits a response from her companion that she describes as being “corrected” and “instructed” (p. 24). The authoritative ascription which Emily grants her companion’s “short but edifying lecture” indicates her complete acceptance of what she is told (p. 24). And so she learns that the slaves are not native to the island any more than the Europeans are, with the important difference that while slaves were “imported from Africa to help ease our labour problem”, Europeans “are here on a civilising and economic mission” (p. 24). As for what happened to the native people, she is told that they “were discovered to be too troublesome and unused to European ways and had to be dispatched” (p. 24). This euphemistic description elides the genocide that is being discussed, shaping it into an ideologically acceptable form. It is followed by its justification: the Carib Indians were ferocious, bearing more “semblance to the wild irrationality of the lion than the passionate intensity of a man”; “their powers of reasoning” were underdeveloped; and they were cannibals, demonstrating an “implacable opposition to correction” (p. 24). In short, they were sub-human and could thus be legitimately eliminated.³⁶

Accepting this, Emily reports that “having been corrected on the count of the native peoples, I was now instructed on the question of colour” (p. 25). The continued repetition of “correction” – its reference switching between Emily’s seemingly scholarly acceptance of it as opposed to the native’s

³⁶ See Hulme (1992, pp. 13-87) for an excellent detailed analysis of the ways in which the native peoples of the Caribbean were discursively constructed, first as savage, and subsequently as either Arawak (characterised as peaceful or docile) or Carib (characterised as cannibals) according to the degree of resistance displayed towards the Europeans’ presence. The book-keeper’s “unused to European ways” can be seen to stand in for “unwilling to be subjected to European control”, with the savage, cannibalistic description of the Caribs functioning as the definition of such “unsuited” peoples, and working as a justification for their extermination.

unreasoning opposition to it – distances Emily, perhaps unconsciously, from the “cannibals” that she has been hearing about, reinforcing her sense of racial superiority. Additionally, it is suggestive that Emily is writing this section of her journal “on land” (p. 18), that is, after this journey to the plantation, and her recollection and understanding of events is shaped by those events themselves, not to mention her encounter with Mr Brown at the dinner table. It is not implausible then that this unconscious reinforcement of racial superiority and distancing from the “dispatched” natives contains the shadow of Emily’s own vulnerability and unease which she feels at the end of the section when she is presumably writing. There is here, another possible resonance between herself and the “others” of Europe. As for what she learns in her instruction on colour, it is that “there are many shades of black... the lighter the shade of black, the nearer to salvation and acceptability was the negro” (p. 25). And that this is so “should be clear to even the most egalitarian observer” (p. 25). Again, we observe that she readily accepts this as fact.

What begins to be revealed is how the combination of Emily’s lack of self-presence, her racism, and naive gullibility is the primary means through which her aspirations to objectivity are undermined. Correspondingly this marks the beginning of her immersion in and acceptance of an intensely racist discourse. However, the traces of scientific aspiration remain throughout her journey to the plantation and the rest of her journal: her referencing of sources, her meticulous summaries of what she considers authoritative explanations, the recurrence of phrases such as and similar to “it should be clear”, as in the ubiquitous “I have been led to believe” (p. 67). All of these discursive markers abound in her journal, yet, as Ledent notes, her discourse has the effect of “expos[ing] her rather than the objects of her research” (p. 86). Timothy Bewes sums this up when he comments, “Emily is an aspiring writer and lecturer... But what we read in her journal are the outpourings of a stilted, derivative, and ideologically unreflective writer, inhabiting the literary discourse of a hegemonic, culturally dominant Europe” (2006, p. 4). It is unsurprising then, given the ease of her shift in perspective at the beginning of her time in the Caribbean, that the rest of Emily’s journal tracks the process through which she begins to “warm to the racism of plantation life” (Low, p. 124). While the

exposure of her racism and naivety is quite sudden, her shift towards supporting the institution of slavery is more gradual, though it proceeds through the same combination of racism and naivety, that is her unreliability, which I have detailed here and to which I will return.

Pivotal for her transition to supporting slavery is her relationship to the plantation manager Mr Brown. While still en route to the plantation, Emily enquires of her companion about the manager that she expects to find there, a Mr Wilson. The book-keeper is unwilling to give a clear answer and Emily holds her peace, content to wait until her arrival at the great house. Upon arriving she hears of a Mr Brown, and meets him later at dinner that evening. It is an upsetting experience for her. Mr Brown fails to accord with her expectations of manners, his announcing of himself and shaking Emily's hand marking "the onset and the conclusion of this man's civility" (p. 30): he dismisses her enquiry after Mr Wilson with "mocking laughter" (p. 31), and makes no objection when the enigmatic "black wench" Christiania briefly interrupts their meal to whisper in his ear with a smirk (p. 31). Christiania is important, and I will return to her. At this point though Emily is not pleased with Mr Brown, and is still ignorant of the fate of Mr Wilson, as she will remain for a few more weeks since after dinner she falls seriously ill and only sees Mr Brown again after her recovery.

Emily's next encounter with him does nothing to shift him out of her negative opinion. Taking a tour of the grounds with Stella, the slave who is filling the role of her personal servant, she comes across Mr Brown whipping a slave, "a black Hercules of a brute who far outweighed and outspanned him" (p. 41), and who is later introduced as Cambridge. While Emily thinks that slaves, as they are mortal and accordingly make errors, need to be whipped (another startling revelation of her racist disposition), it is something that must be done in a "judicious" manner and not with "vindictive malice" (p. 41). It is precisely such a vindictive whipping that she considers herself to observe the "villain" Mr Brown applying to Cambridge (p. 41). Emily's opinion of him during these two encounters is quite clear from her chosen adjectives. Describing the whipping, in addition to calling him a villain she describes him as a "coarse man" and a "fool" (pp. 41, 42). In describing the earlier dinner she

writes that he was wont to “cackle rudely and attack his meat”, that he is an “arrogant man” whose “ignorance knows no boundaries”, and whom she is persuaded “must go” (p. 31). It is remarkable then, and a crucial instance of, ironically, her ignorance and gullibility, how swiftly and thoroughly this opinion is inverted.

Shortly after witnessing the whipping, Emily entertains her first guests at the Great House of the plantation: Mr McDonald, the doctor that tended her during her illness, and his friend Mr Rogers, a minister. During the visit, the form of Emily’s conversation with the book-keeper is repeated: she largely accepts the views of these two men as authoritative and consequently shifts her perspective closer to the point from which she begins to defend slavery. At one point in the afternoon Mr Rogers accidentally mentions the fact that Mr Wilson is no longer resident on the island. The men are unwilling to say any more and Emily remains ignorant of the reason for Mr Wilson’s absence. Shortly after her guests have left, however, Mr Brown surprisingly requests that Emily join him for dinner (p. 57). She does not consider what might motivate Mr Brown suddenly to engage with her – only regretting her assent to the proposal – but it is suggestive that he does so shortly after Emily’s exposure to those outside of his direct purview.

Initially the topic of discussion is Christiania, whom Emily is disturbed to realise is joining them at dinner. She challenges Mr Brown on the decorum of the arrangement, in response to which he is again dismissive, commenting that once she had spent more time there she “might come to understand that everything is not as in England” (p. 58). Angered by this, she calms herself and takes advantage of the “little momentum” of Mr Brown talking to enquire after the injudicious whipping she witnessed (p. 58). Her record of his response is significant. Against expectations he provides an explanation, telling her that there is a perpetual fear of “insurrection” by the slaves, with the result that “discipline” is the “chief and governing principle on every estate” (p. 59). Cambridge, as the main cause of trouble, must be subjected to the whip. She is even more surprised, when “he apologised, yes, he apologised for any discomfort caused by my witnessing of his behaviour” (p. 59). This

interchange marks the beginning of a shift in her attitude towards Mr Brown, her surprise registering a consideration that her earlier assessment of his character was perhaps mistaken, a misrecognition.

After the dinner there is an onset of a more sustained interaction with Emily on the part of Mr Brown, and it soon becomes habitual for them to “engage in a few pleasantries” (pp. 61-62). It is during one of these that he explains the absence of Mr Wilson: “Apparently this man had been stealing from the estate and has fled to another island.... apart from the petty thieving, the chief complaint against Mr Wilson was that he was not sufficiently aware of the imminent threat of a slave revolt” (p. 62). Emily remains uncertain as to whether Wilson was forced to leave or did so of his own accord, but she nevertheless uncritically accepts Brown’s account of events. Indeed, she has no evidence to the contrary: the book-keeper, doctor and minister have all been reticent with their knowledge, only accidentally letting it slip that Wilson no longer resided on the island. And so, with Brown’s “initial resentment” towards Emily apparently fading – that is, her opinion of him slowly warming – she accepts what he tells her (p. 62). His designation has tellingly shifted from being a rude and arrogant man to being a skilful manager of the plantation despite “all his surliness” (p. 63).

Mr Brown will climb still higher in Emily’s esteem after their major confrontation. Emily arrives one afternoon at lunch and “yet again found Mr Brown’s strange and haughty black woman, Christiania” (p. 73). Promptly ordering her to leave as she is “not accustomed to eating... in the company of slaves” (p. 73), Christiania is incontinent and so Emily repeats her command. When she still refuses to leave, citing Mr Brown’s permission to remain, the attending slaves are unwilling to forcefully remove her from the table due to their fear of her occult *Obeah*. Emily finally flees to her “bed-chamber,” she writes, “where I concealed both my tear-stained face and my impotent rage” (p. 74). This is Emily’s first direct experience of powerlessness. Suspecting that Christiania is Brown’s mistress, she interrogates Stella on the possibility and is met only with a stony silence. Needing to respond to the situation in some way, Emily resolves to confront Mr Brown himself. Venturing into the fields in the heat of the day to do so, the resulting scene is significant. The focus is the confrontational climax

between her and Mr Brown. Demanding that Christiania no longer sit at the table with them, she plays her “last card” (p. 77): “Mr Brown, if you do not display more consideration for my position, immediately upon my return I shall have you replaced” (pp. 77-78). The threat is effective, resulting in a complete change of Mr Brown’s behaviour towards Emily, though she will drastically mistake the cause. This passage is also revealing in Emily’s reaction to the slave Fox. Instructed by Mr Brown to return Emily to the house, “the nigger laid his black hands upon my body, at which I screamed and felt my stomach turn in revulsion, at which its contents emptied upon the ground” (p. 78). Here we see not only the visceral character of her racism, which is relatively easily provoked, but that the interpellation “nigger” – which caused her “a little discomfort” when used of the pilot aboard the ship (p. 17) – surfaces after an entire journal where slaves have thus far been meticulously referred to as either “blacks” or “negroes”. The term is quickly submerged once more, however, but it is only a week later that Emily formulates her desire to conduct a lecture tour and write a pamphlet which will defend the slave trade. She is convinced that abolitionists only decry slavery because they “do not comprehend the base condition of the negro” (p. 86) implying, since she had previously supported the emancipation of slaves, that she had until then also failed to comprehend the slave’s true condition.

After this confrontation, Emily quickly notices the change in Mr Brown’s behaviour, and we see the staggering misrecognition of his motives: “This past week has marked a profound change in the heart and soul of Mr Brown. *I can only assume that his gentler aspect has made an appearance as a result of guilt*, but whatever it is that has provoked this miraculous improvement... I am truly grateful” (p. 82, my emphasis). This is a remarkable moment, conveying Emily’s characteristic certainty that she understands the internal workings of the people she observes and with whom she interacts (an ethically problematic position as the introduction to this thesis showed, and which is later significantly disrupted). That she “can only assume” that it is due to “guilt” that Mr Brown has changed his behaviour – rather than a calculation on his part to retain his position of power – is a vivid moment of naivety. That he is indeed motivated by less noble ends, and not “a profound change” of “heart and

soul”, is revealed later when he deserts Emily after impregnating her. For Emily at this point, however, the interpretation of Mr Brown’s change as revealing a “gentler aspect” completes the shift in her view that had begun with Mr Brown’s apology for his whipping of Cambridge. The position that Emily occupies at this point of the narrative is the inverse of what she occupied aboard the ship. Having come to believe that slavery should be continued, the previously villainous Mr Brown has now been elevated to the level of a friend and an “instructor” in plantation matters, including slavery (p. 85). Later, he will become her lover and she will feel “pure, undistilled, happiness at [her] good fortune to have discovered a man such as Arnold [Mr Brown] in the tropical backwater of the Americas” (p. 118). It is only after this that Emily has her main interactions with Cambridge, and the racism and gullibility that have led to her misrecognition of Mr Brown and the acceptance of his, McDonald’s and Roger’s racism, ensures that the possible recognitions within these various engagements never occur.

It is important to note that although these possible recognitions are prevented from arising due to the discourse which Emily inhabits, she is nevertheless responsible for this failure. I have traced in detail the path that Emily travelled to reach this point and it should be clear that she is aware of an ideological alternative: she understands her position in opposition to an alternative that she has rejected. Despite the fact that it is her own naivety and willingness to trust as authoritative the men on the plantation that has led her to change her mind, she has nevertheless come to her own position within the discourse that she has adopted. She is, however, not “fully” responsible in the classical Enlightenment sense. She has indeed made a choice of her own volition, which has ethical repercussions. Yet we can see that her autonomy is circumscribed by her circumstances, and that she is not a self-aware subject. She is, in short, an instance of the subject for which I argued in the introduction: vulnerable to the vagaries of circumstances, required to make the best choice available to her. That she has made the wrong one becomes clear in the epilogue where we observe her recognition of this error. Now it is important to bear in mind that the power of discourse to foreclose

recognitions, which we are about to consider, reveals Emily as a responsible agent caught in the vulnerability of goodness.

In addition to Emily's first encounter with Cambridge when she witnesses Mr Brown whipping him, there are two further recorded instances of their meeting. The key moment is when Cambridge is asked to guard Emily's room against Christiania (pp. 89-93). Mr Brown is away from the plantation for several days, during which time Emily "began to discern nocturnal scratching noises" (p. 89). When she eventually finds the courage to investigate she discovers "the arrogant black wench, Christiania", "scratching in the dirt" and "uttering sinister sounds" (p. 89). It is assumed that she is working her Obeah, a "dark practise" that was "brought by the negroes from Africa, where open and devoted worship of the devil is still encouraged" (pp. 89-90). The fear that Emily here and elsewhere in the novel experiences due to Christiania's actions (she likens it to that which she felt while aboard the ship, when after Isabella's death "I feared that I should soon be reunited with my dead companion" (p. 89)) marks an important difference from the disruption caused by Cambridge. At present, what is salient is that the slaves have been forbidden by Mr Brown from interfering with Christiania, with the result that the book-keeper, who oversees the estate in Mr Brown's absence, is sent for. His solution to the problem is to post a sentry outside Emily's bedroom in case, she tells us, of "any intrusive assaults, or magical manifestations" (p. 92). Emily agrees since the arrangement will "render some support to [her] failing spirit" (p. 92). The slave who is posted as sentry is Cambridge.

It is when Emily "opened the door a few inches" to see her "negro sentinel" that she learns who he is. The brief interaction that follows is worth citing at length.

My dark sentry looked up at me, and I noted that I appeared to have disturbed him in the most unlikely act of studying the Bible. I asked if this was his common form of recreation, to which he replied in highly fanciful English, that indeed it was. You might imagine my surprise when he then broached the conversational lead and enquired after my family origins, and my opinions pertaining to slavery. I properly declined to share these with him, instead counter-quizzing with enquiries as to the origins of his knowledge. At this a broad grin spread over his face, as though I had fallen into some trap of his setting. Indeed, so disturbing was the negro's confident gleam, that I quickly closed in the door, for I feared this negro was truly ignorant of the correct degree of deference that a lady might reasonably expect from a base slave. (pp. 92-93)

We see here Emily's response to a slave who, as Low puts it, is "lettered, articulate, educated, and a Christian, the antithesis of Emily's sons of Ham" (p. 125). Her initial response is surprise and curiosity, which transmutes into fear. The understanding of slaves that she has developed through her journal up until this point can be discerned in her description of the scene. It is "unlikely" for them to read the bible, indeed to read at all; it is startling for a slave to take the "conversational lead", and improper to share certain details of her life with them. In short, she neither expects nor desires any true interaction or dialogue. Cambridge refuses to accept this role. Not only does he take initiative in the conversation, which Emily finds surprising and refuses to answer, but this turns to fear when he refuses to reply to her in turn. It is primarily Cambridge's "confident gleam," however, that disturbs her: his refusal to relate to her as an inferior, objectified being. Forced, as Ledent puts it, to respond to Cambridge as a subject (p. 90), Emily retreats both physically and intellectually, and unconvincingly imposes her racist discourse upon the situation. She designates a man who is clearly educated enough to elicit her inquiry into "the origins of his knowledge" as "ignorant," and supports it by claiming as reasonable the "deference" that she expects "from a base slave". On the one hand though, this self-assured claim of being on the side of reason is, ironically, at odds with the entire situation, which Ledent observes exposes her "carefully concealed irrationality" (p. 90). Emily writes that the mysterious nocturnal sounds made her afraid that "some strange beast might be waiting for an opportunity to assault and devour me body and soul" (p. 89). She is also soothed by the knowledge that there will be a sentry to guard against any physical as well as "magical manifestations" (p. 92). In a situation thus marked with irrational fear, Emily nevertheless asserts the reasonableness of her fear of Cambridge. On the other hand, if it were reasonable for a slave to show deference in a manner that reflects his "base" state, then Cambridge's refusal to act as an inferior creature – that is, his confidence – might be a demonstration of ignorance and disrespect. But it is precisely this understanding of slavery and of himself which he *knowingly* contests: his evident education marks his refusal of the role of "a base slave" as being founded on knowledge and not as a display of ignorance. Although Emily does not consciously recognise this contestation, it registers in her fear. Her

immersion in the ideology of the plantation has foreclosed the possibility that Cambridge's confidence could be anything other than sinister – “some trap of his setting” – and so she flees from it, contradicting the evidence of the situation and her own actions within it, by designating Cambridge as ignorant and dangerous. In this way she forecloses any possible recognition that might have arisen from the commonality between them.

It is necessary for Emily to explain away the counterevidence to her assumption of Cambridge's inferiority. As such, his fluency in English is described as “highly fanciful”. This derogation of skills and behaviours that fail to conform to Emily's idea of slaves is a common feature of her journal, as Ledent has observed (p. 87). Cambridge's fluency, which in his own narrative he describes as superior to Mr Brown's (p. 161) (and is therefore likely close to Emily's own), is later characterised by Emily as a “lunatic precision in his dealings with our English words” (p. 120), though there is more at work than simple derogation at that point. This pattern is also evidenced in her disgust when witnessing a slave woman bathing, even though she knows that the woman is dirty due to her labours (pp. 101-102), and in her characterising of the loyalty of slaves as “the animal fidelity of the dog” (p. 54). This last is particularly important as it will return, in a transformed form, in the epilogue. That Emily uses the word “lunatic” to describe Cambridge's handling of the English language is not accidental, exhibiting as it does a continuation of her initial response to Cambridge's disturbing confidence.

The characterisation occurs after Cambridge has appeared before Mr Brown on a charge of theft. Emily and Mr Brown have just returned from a romantic evening when the matter is brought to Mr Brown's attention. Emily is a witness to the proceedings (constituting her second and final encounter with Cambridge, though she does not speak with him directly), during which he answers Mr Brown's questions rationally and in his “polite English” (p. 112), exhibiting “the manner and speech of one familiar with conventions of the bar” (p. 112). When matters are not progressing quickly, Mr Brown is persuaded by Emily (we learn later (p. 128)) to “suspend judgement” of the case, leaving the situation unresolved (p. 113). Suggestively, Emily is not engaging with Cambridge directly and her

characterisation of him during the hearing correspondingly lacks the fear that was a part of their earlier conversation. Yet in the time subsequent to Cambridge's impromptu hearing, Emily becomes physically intimate with Mr Brown. Nearly two weeks later, Emily urges him to come to a decision over Cambridge:

The curious behaviour of this over-confident, Bible-reading slave demanded immediate attention. I confessed to Arnold that to my observation this bondsman had about his gaze an unsound quality. Furthermore, I insisted that he seemed determined to adopt a lunatic precision in his dealings with our English words, as though the black imagined himself to be a part of our white race. (p. 120)

Cambridge's speech has shifted from being disparaged as "fanciful", through being described as "polite", to now bearing the mark of madness. Once again, Cambridge's confidence is central to Emily's fear. As she has now had greater exposure to Cambridge's evident education, and the contestation of his inferiority is correspondingly stronger, she is no longer able to classify it as ignorance. We see that she has come to recognise the claim that he is making: that he is equal to them (which in his own narrative, as will be seen, is also thought of as being part of the "white race": "Truly I was now an Englishman, albeit a little smudgy of complexion!" (p. 147)). Emily also now recognises that Cambridge's fluency in English is extensive, as more than a slave's "highly fanciful" attempt at imitation: it is part of his claim to equality, to "be a part of our white race". As Ledent notes, "Cambridge's mastery of English jeopardises racial boundaries" (p. 90). It is not possible however, for her racist ideology to acknowledge such a claim as anything other than madness, and so we see again how her discourse circumscribes the disruption that Cambridge effects. It is "as though the black imagined..." the phrasing implying that this is a ludicrous idea. The inferiority of the darker races is considered established, and thus to claim equality and to contest that inferiority is to demonstrate "an unsound quality".

Key to understanding this argument that knowledge is shaped and limited by discourse is Foucault's well known watershed study, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and it will be useful to briefly reflect on his argument before returning to Emily. In his study, Foucault begins by setting out to investigate the validity of the categories by which we commonly understand and categorise statements. What is it

that makes, for instance, the discourse of Psychiatry a unified discourse? Working systematically through the commonly held reasons, Foucault eliminates each one: there is no common object, no common speaker, and so on. The unity of a discourse, Foucault argues, rests not in these elements within the discourse but rather in their rules of formation, the rules according to which the statements must be made: “[If] there really is a unity, it does not lie in the visible, horizontal coherence of the elements formed; it resides, well anterior to their formation, in the system that makes possible and governs that formation” (1972, p. 80). This “system of formation” refers to the relations between societal elements (such as, for Psychiatry, the laboratory and the hospital, to name only two) that must be activated for the statements within the discourse to be made. It designates “a complex group of relations that function as a rule: it lays down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organised” (p. 82). These rules of formation form the coherence that Foucault terms a “discursive formation”. Proceeding to analyse the idea of the statement, Foucault again systematically eliminates common definitions which equate statements with grammar or logic. He argues instead that a statement is an enunciative function that “has a bearing on a group of signs” and which require certain relations to be in place (p. 129), that is, they require a discursive formation. He concludes: “We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation... it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined” (p. 131).

These conditions of possibility, the rules according to and by which statements are made, Foucault goes on to “propose to call *archive*” (p. 145). This is not an archive in the sense that Eckstein uses it, as referring to a library, a store of texts. The archive “is *the general system of the formation and transformation of statements*” (p. 146). The archive is the rules which enable us to speak, while simultaneously limiting what it is possible to say: it is the “principle of rarification”, the reason why “on the basis of grammar and of the wealth of vocabulary available at a given period, there are, in total, relatively few things that are said” (p. 134). Having developed this understanding of the archive,

“the first law of what can be said” (p. 145), Foucault is able to define what is involved in an archaeology of knowledge: “Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive” (p. 148); it is an approach to discourse that is concerned not with the elements within a discourse, or the biography or intentions of the speakers of a discourse, but with the material conditions and relations that both limit and enable statements to emerge. It must be emphasised though that the archive is not static: discourses change and evolve. Foucault uses the term “historical a priori” to describe it (p. 143): the archive is a condition of possibility, it is an a priori; it is also subject to change, it has a history.

What is pertinent from this is that what is said by any one person at any one time is dependent upon what they are able to say, an ability which is decided not by their intentions but by their social context. An important instance of this can be found in Peter Hulme’s careful analysis of Christopher Columbus’ journal of his first voyage to the Americas, which I referred to earlier. There are, Hulme argues, two discourses at work in Columbus’ journal, at first co-existing relatively peacefully, but later vying for interpretive mastery: “there is what might be called a discourse of Oriental civilization and a discourse of savagery” (1992, p. 21). Both discourses have a common referent, gold, which is the main object and purpose of the voyage. In the first discourse “gold” is accompanied by the key terms “‘Cathay’, ‘Grand Khan’, ‘intelligent soldiers’, large buildings’, ‘merchant ships’”; in the latter it is accompanied by “‘savagery’, ‘monstrosity’, ‘anthropophagy’ [cannibalism]” (pp. 20-21). Although Columbus never believed that he had failed to arrive in the Far East, and the discourse of Oriental civilisation is initially dominant in the journal, there is a crucial moment at which the discourse of savagery attains the mastery.

Upon arriving in the Americas, Columbus heads in a south-westerly direction thinking that it will eventually take him towards the “great Khan”. When he comes upon Cuba, he is faced with a choice: the Cuban coastline runs north-west to south-east; he can go no further south-west and must turn either north or south, each direction corresponding to one of the interpretative discourses. What

follows next “marks the site of a discursive conflict” (p. 30). Turning north-west, the obvious choice “if he were seeking the Grand Khan’s cities” due to his latitudinal position (p. 30), he sails north-westerly along the coast of Cuba for two days before turning about and heading south-east instead. The change in direction marks the shift from the Oriental discourse to the discourse of savagery, from one discourse of white supremacy to another. Hulme’s reading of this section of the journal is detailed, covering the faulty quadrant reading (three times Columbus gets a reading of 41° rather than the 21° of his true position), the dispatch of an embassy inland, and the exaggerated weather report. Each event serves as a justification for the change in direction, masking the unconscious shift of interpretative discourses (pp. 22-34). What is important is the way in which the record of this crucial episode in the history of the Caribbean shows the traces of the shaping force of discourse. These two discourses, each with their own, but intertwined, political context in Europe at the time (pp. 34-39), provide the possible ways in which the Caribbean can be understood, as either Oriental or savage. The primacy of the discourse of savagery has, as I noted, moulded the understanding, naming and categorising of the New World. And we have seen Emily shift discourses, coming to accept and function within this racist discourse of white superiority. Consequently, Cambridge’s claim of equality is refused as false, and his assertion of it is designated as unsound.

Cambridge is not categorised as completely mad, however. He has only an unsound “quality” (p. 120). Part of the reason for this, as Ledent suggests, is that Cambridge’s disruption of Emily’s racism is graspable: he reads the bible, speaks English, and exhibits familiarity with legal conventions. In short, while his manner and appearance are contrary to Emily’s assumptions regarding Africans, Cambridge does not articulate anything that is contrary to her idea of civilisation and reason. She is unable to accept it because he is African, not because of what he does. It is only the combination of the two terms – civilised and African – which her discourse is unable to allow. Christiania on the other hand, while exhibiting confidence (she is regularly denigrated by Emily as “arrogant” and “haughty” (pp. 73, 89, 120)), is very unlike Cambridge. While Cambridge speaks civilly, Christiania looses “invective”, “hurling abuse like some sooty witch from *Macbeth*” (p. 75), and utters “sinister sounds” (p. 89),

making “noises as if she were communing with the devil himself” (p. 91). Where Cambridge’s spirituality is recognisable, Christiania’s alleged Obeah (Cambridge denies the claim) is unknown and terrifies Emily, exposing her own irrational, dark self (Ledent, pp. 90-91). Christiania thus slips entirely beneath the surface of comprehensibility for Emily, becoming unreadable and as a result is characterised as “crazy” (p. 89).³⁷ Christiania’s name, linking her to Christianity, only serves to sharpen her unreadability, marking everything which she is not.

In this way the disturbing presence of both Cambridge and Christiania is contained by the racist discourse which Emily has accepted and affirmed, never leading to a shift in her understanding, to recognition. It is not insignificant that at the time of her interactions with Cambridge (and, to a certain extent, Christiania), Emily is relatively content with life. Before the close of the novel she will come to a transforming recognition – the main predicate of which is Stella – but, similarly to the recognition of Kalua by Deeti in Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, it is only through emotional distress that this breaching of an entrenched social boundary occurs. There are two catalysts for this, the return of Mr Wilson and Emily’s pregnancy. Occurring in the epilogue, this recognition is only present in its traces. Even after occurring, therefore, the lack of its presence only serves to emphasise the lack that I have been tracking in Emily’s journal, and which we will likewise see in Cambridge’s final testament. As such, the functioning of recognition is almost the inverse of what we observed in *The Hungry Tide*. Although in both instances the ethical effect is to affirm a common humanity, in Ghosh this commonality is the positive predicate of the recognition which functions as the novel’s climatic *peripeteia*; here the

³⁷ It must be noted that Cambridge considers Christiania mad as well (pp. 163-164). The difference is that Cambridge is aware of the trauma Christiania has suffered, and has witnessed her steady deterioration. Emily is simply faced with behaviour that is unreadable, which when added to the allegation of Obeah transforms Christiania for her into a lunatic witch. Whether Christiania is actually involved in Obeah remains in doubt throughout the novel as Cambridge denies it, although he recognises that her “undeniably spiritual nature was absorbed in an entirely different direction” (p. 159). The possibility cannot, then, be ruled out that Cambridge is in denial and that, in addition to the trauma of abuse Christiania has suffered, her ventures into “zones of illogicality” are in part related to her Obeah (p. 164). They would of course have their own logic for Christiania, but would be unreadable for Cambridge since he has completely internalised English civilisation and its rationalism. Indeed, he tellingly describes Christiania’s eating dirt as “paganism” (p. 164), though this designation could, given the rest of Cambridge’s narrative, plausibly stand in for his understanding of something like “inhuman” or “savage”.

commonality is only marginally confirmed in the narrative (it is, indeed, overlooked by a number of critics), leaving it primarily to the reader to affirm, in response to its absence in the main narratives.

An important similarity between the narratives of Emily and Cambridge is how each is peripheral to the other. Although Cambridge plays a significant part in Emily's narrative, his importance is tethered to his role in her primary concerns: to her comfort on the plantation and her relationship with Mr Brown. He does not constitute a sustained focus. For his part, Cambridge explicitly states: "The English woman did not concern me" (p. 164). His narrative is his final testament, and is concerned to recount for us the story of his life and how it is that he came to kill Mr Brown. We thus learn that as a young man, Olumide (who would finally be renamed Cambridge) was captured and sold into slavery. He was transported to the Americas, where he was bought by an Englishman, was renamed Thomas, and again transported, this time to England. Spending nearly a decade in England, he learns the language, converts to Christianity, and marries an Englishwoman. It is his conversion that enables him to write his testament, as a part of the conversion process was receiving an education. Upon completion of his training he is again renamed, this time as David Henderson. When his owner passes away he travels the country with his wife, preaching against the slave trade (doing what Emily only aspires to do, but for the other side). His wife soon dies in childbirth and shortly after he buys passage back to Africa where he intends to work as a missionary. However, upon arriving at the coast he is taken as a slave by the captain of the ship, resold, and comes to be at Emily's father's plantation in the West Indies where he is renamed Cambridge.

Cambridge's education as a Christian is crucial as it marks his entire narrative, demonstrating his acceptance of the discourse of civilisation and progress, which depends upon the existence of Africa as savage and uncivilised. So we read that he learns to write in the "blessed English language" (p. 142), and that his "uncivilised African demeanour began to fall from my person" (p. 144). That there is a significant amount of ideological conditioning in his embracing of English civilisation is indicated when he comments that "already Africa spoke only to me of a barbarity I had fortunately *fled*" (p.

143, my emphasis). This imputation of his own agency to being taken as a slave is later reiterated when he designates himself as an Englishman, defining himself against Africa which “spoke to me only of a history I had cast aside” (p. 147). It is only when he is again taken as a slave that the full extent to which he has internalised the values of English civilisation, and justified his enslavement to himself, become apparent. Bemoaning his situation, he writes: “That I, a virtual Englishman, was to be treated as base African cargo, caused me such hurtful pain as I was barely able to endure” (p. 156). The implication is that even though he speaks out against slavery, denouncing it as evil, he is nevertheless partly constituted by the discourse of civilisation and therefore conveys, as Ledent puts it, a sense in which he considers himself “an exception to an otherwise acceptable treatment” (p. 98).

In addition to the savagery and inferiority of Africa, part of the discourse of Christian civilisation that Cambridge has imbibed with his education is a severe patriarchy: the prejudices of a society that, as Emily puts it, “despise my sex” (p. 113). We see this in his reaction to Christiania’s worsening condition, which eventually leads to her scratching in the dirt beneath Emily’s window. Being driven mad by the sexual and emotional abuses that she has suffered as a slave, not least at the hands of Mr Brown who rapes her, Christiania (whom Cambridge has taken as his wife) begins to deteriorate further after Emily’s arrival, and “began now openly to mock at my Christian beliefs and to scream out for her long-lost mother” (p. 163). Her condition causes Cambridge both sorrow and anger: “for, as is well known, a Christian man possesses his wife, and the dutiful wife must obey her Christian husband” (p. 163). The telling phrase “as is well known” occurs in both Emily and Cambridge’s accounts, where it indicates an acceptance of the status quo (Ledent, p. 97). It is his concern for Christiania that brings Cambridge to resist Mr Brown, and which leads to the confrontation during which he kills him. His stated intention for that confrontation is clear: “That he must cease his tormenting of my *wife* would be the main thrust of my message” (p. 168). He draws strength for his fight against Mr Brown by understanding it as “couched in terms of a holy crusade” (p. 164) and it is in the next sentence that he dismisses Emily as irrelevant. We see then that in the same way that Cambridge has only secondary significance for her, Emily is of concern to him only insofar as her

presence causes a worsening of Christiania's condition (p. 164). He thus (correctly) assumes that she is near to powerless, and uncritically accepts the patriarchal organisation of the plantation. For this reason, Ledent rightly argues that Cambridge and Emily "inversely participate in the oppression of each other" (p. 102): Emily through her acceptance of racism and defence of the slavery, Cambridge through his acceptance of patriarchy.

Both Cambridge and Emily have the possibility of an authentic recognition of the common humanity of the other foreclosed by the discourses through which they interpret and understand the world. Despite the similarities between them – the resonances of powerlessness and marginality, of being governed, as it were, by the wills of white men – the possible disruption that each could be to the other's understanding never achieves recognition as it does with the characters I have considered in the work of Ghosh and Adichie. Ironically, Emily and Cambridge have similar views on the savagery of Africans, differing mainly in degree and in their understanding of the cure – slavery versus education. This gives Cambridge's narrative a tragic structure to it, which rests in his acceptance of European civilisation. It is his education that enables him to resist Mr Brown, to gain the respect of the other slaves, and to work against slavery while still in England. Nevertheless, as I have noted, his acceptance of the discourses of civilisation results in his justifying his own initial slavery to himself, and feeling that his second enslavement is unjust, not primarily because it is enslavement but due to his identity as a virtual Englishman, with a "superior *English* mind, inferior only to the Christian goodness in my heart" (p. 155). In short, his acceptance of the discourse of progress and civilisation, while enabling him to challenge slavery, simultaneously undercuts that resistance and can be seen to ultimately legitimise it. It is precisely this discourse that served as the alibi for slavery, something which is evidenced in Emily's narrative where it forms a crucial part of her justification of the practice (pp. 85-86). Cambridge's resistance to the system is therefore simultaneously a reinforcement of it; his resistance of his subjection is founded upon its justification. This tragic double bind in which Cambridge finds himself has distinct similarities to that outlined by David Scott, which I discussed in the introduction: the use of Enlightenment terms for the critique of the Enlightenment. It is due to

this tragic tension that Low suggests reading Cambridge's final fear as "not only... the despair of a Christian man who commits a murder, but may also be the despair of a man who is 'truly frightened' by the prospect that all he holds dear may be a sham" (p. 126).

While Cambridge and Emily both fail in this way to recognise the similarities between them, Emily's ethical position does not remain static as Cambridge's does. Caryl Phillips comments in an interview: "The supreme irony in *Cambridge* is that the black man becomes the character you're supposed to like the least, because [Emily] grows, he shrinks" (Jaggi, 1994, p. 27). Crucial for Emily's growth is the crisis with which her journal closes. The catalyst, as I have said, is Mr Wilson returning to the island, who in Emily's words, "has thrown himself upon my mercy" (p. 123). Meeting with him, she hears a different recounting of his departure from the island to what she received from Mr Brown. Asserting that he was "banished by Mr Brown at gunpoint" (p. 124), he presses upon her that "through a perverse stubbornness Mr Brown was mis-managing and abusing the property of my family, and that had Mr Wilson not been in fear of his life he would never have abandoned the estate" (p. 125). When she counters that she had been "reliably informed that he had been dismissed for theft" (p. 125) – her source of course being none other than Mr Brown – Mr Wilson "threw back his head and roared with laughter" (p. 125). Insisting on the ludicrous nature of the charge, Mr Wilson's version of events confuses and distresses Emily. Whether his testimony is true or not is irrelevant, though it is shown later to be true. Its importance rests in it being the first counter-evidence to Emily's understanding of affairs that she is unable to simply dismiss: it is presented by an educated, white gentleman. As such, it throws into disarray her carefully mapped intellectual progression, as she has thought of it, which was heavily dependent upon the understanding and opinions of others. Her distress is more than just intellectual confusion and doubt: her sexual relationship with Mr Brown is based upon the same foundation which is here called into question. That Emily does believe Mr Wilson's version of events can be seen when she later expresses her sympathy for "[p]oor Mr Wilson, who has suffered so much in his struggle to maintain his values and his dignity" (p. 127). It is a sympathetic observation, which immediately grounds itself in the logical consequences for her own position: "And, of course, poor

me" (p. 127). The misery of her crisis is intensified when she discovers that she is pregnant and that Mr Brown has abandoned her, which works to further confirm Mr Wilson's testimony. For the first time in the novel, then, Emily has real doubt about what she has so confidently assumed herself to know, and this doubt is emotionally distressing. At the close of the journal entry in which she relates this, she begins to speculate, seemingly with her usual confidence, about the kind of person that settles in the Caribbean. But she then, for the first time, stops herself: "I do not know. How can I know? I have so much still to learn" (p. 127).

This Socratic admission of ignorance by itself does not, however, result in a change of how Emily understands racial difference. Her next and final journal entry records the death of Brown at the hands of Cambridge and is shaped by her sorrow at that event, the "injuries that are daily afflicted upon mankind, let alone my poor soul" (pp. 127-128). Throughout this experience, of her knowledge being thrown into question, of her emotional distress as a result of her pregnancy, Mr Brown's abandonment of her, and his murder, she still maintains her racist views: "O lucky Isabella that she never lived to see these shores, never lived to witness the treachery of the negro that some would set free to wreak havoc upon our persons. Their lying subservience, their sly pilfering, their murderous violence, mark them out as very like the Irish..." (p. 129). Although reflecting her emotional state at Mr Brown's death, her racism here is congruous with its earlier manifestations. At the journal's end Emily's understanding is largely unchanged. It is only in the epilogue that we learn how these tumultuous experiences eventually result in an alteration of her perspective. That the journal closes with a comparison between Isabella and Stella is, in view of this, salient since many of the traces of Emily's coming recognition involve Stella, who at this point is only a "sad black imitation" of Isabella but will become much more important (p. 129).

The epilogue, narrated by the same modern, extra-diegetic narrator of the prologue, tells us of Emily's condition roughly nine months later. She is living in a rundown cottage, and has delivered her child stillborn. There are only three people present: the doctor Mr McDonald, Stella, and Emily

herself. Throughout Emily's journal Stella has been seen to be a faithful attendant, genuinely fond of her; Emily has refused to reciprocate the affection. A case in point transpires not long after Emily's arrival at the plantation. She records that Stella "asked me if I might address her as *Aunt Stella*" (p. 36). What the reader understands as an overture of friendship and companionship, Emily views as an example "of the looseness of negro morals", exemplified in "how easily they appropriate titles which in our world have a deep and proper meaning" (p. 36). She therefore refuses the request, writing that "her Aunts Mabel and Victoria bore no relation, physical or otherwise, to this ebony matriarch" (p. 36). While Emily does not reciprocate the friendship, she nevertheless finds comfort in Stella's faithful attendance. After confronting Mr Brown in the fields, Emily awakens and writes, "I was pleased to see the loyal Stella hover over me with concern writ large and bold across her sooty face. How far she has come in matching the loyalty of the dearly departed Isabella! Although sadly lacking the natural advantages of my former companion... my sable companion has virtue still" (p. 78). There are a number of moments in Emily's journal when this pleasure at Stella's loyalty is evident. Yet despite this, Emily continues to demarcate and enforce what she perceives as inherent racial boundaries. Throughout, Stella remains fond of Emily such that Cambridge notes in passing, towards the end of his narrative, her tearful state when "Mr Brown had taken no interest in her beloved Miss Emily once the details of the latter's condition had been discovered by the physician" (p. 167). Emily's opinion of Stella as but a poor imitation of Isabella persists until the end of her journal. It is particularly striking, then, how much concern Emily evidences for her in the epilogue. She has just lost her baby, yet it is Stella's pain at the loss, Stella who "had hoped for something they might share", that occupies most of her mind to the point that she "dreamed of something that she might give Stella to replace that which had been lost" (p. 178). Dramatised by the narrative focus turning repeatedly to Stella in the opening pages of the epilogue, this concern, together with Emily's opening reflection that for Stella "a terrible ordeal was reaching its conclusion" (p. 177) and her designation as Emily's "grief-stricken companion" (p. 178), all signify that something has changed.

One aspect of the change is the continuation of the doubt we saw at the close of the journal. In the nine months since then, the slaves have been emancipated and life on the island has changed considerably as a result. Talking about the effects of emancipation and his plans for returning to England, Mr McDonald says, "I take it you're not an emancipationist" (p. 179). His assumption is not unreasonable, given the previous influence of his views over Emily's. Yet she replies unexpectedly. Previously, she thought that slaves, if freed, would "wreak havoc upon our persons" (p. 129). She now replies, "You may take it that I am not sure of what I am" (p. 179). More hesitant to posit an opinion than she was before (though there is also the possible reason that she does not want to reveal her thoughts to McDonald), we can see the internalisation of the doubt she earlier experienced. No longer confined to a specific object of knowledge – Mr Brown – her uncertainty has become more epistemic, something that could already be observed when she interrupted her habitually certain thoughts after visiting Mr Wilson. That she has become less ignorant and naive is most consciously marked when she reflects back on her relationship with Mr Brown: "Love, love, love. You see, I'm not such a bad woman am I? Except love for him ran only a short distance. To the point where he was losing control. And freedom. She knew this now. And then it was turned off. And forgotten. A mistake. She fell over like a foal" (p. 182). The gullible naivety that was seen in her relationship with Mr Brown has here been replaced by the knowledge that for him love "ran only a short distance" and could be "turned off" when things spiralled out of control: it was not the unexpected, amazing discovery that she had thought. This error is also recognised as having been a stage of growth, as a stumbling that is part of a foal learning to walk.

There is more at work though than a progression out of naivety. Immediately following this reflection on her relationship with Mr Brown, Emily "thought warmly of Stella. Without doubt their greatest virtue was their unswerving loyalty" (p. 182). The emotional bond that has formed between Emily and Stella, evidenced here and in the opening of the epilogue, is crucial. The close connection between Emily's recollection of falling over like a foal and her warm thoughts of Stella suggests that, for Emily's part, this bond flourished when she was vulnerable. That Emily goes onto speak of loyalty suggests

that it formed particularly due to Stella's continued faithfulness. Importantly, Emily is repeating here, with a correction, her earlier mention of the slaves' "unswerving loyalty". I noted above how the slaves' loyalty was denigrated by Emily as "the animal fidelity of the dog" (p. 54). Here, not only is Stella a "companion", someone of whom Emily thinks "warmly", but her loyalty, which had given Emily comfort and pleasure before, is now taken as representative of her race as "their greatest virtue" (p. 182). This is a *moral* designation, quite distinct from the inherent, amoral loyalty of dogs³⁸, and as such is distinct from Emily's earlier understanding of Africans as immoral savages. This is a complete change in Emily's understanding, serving as evidence that a positive gain in knowledge, namely the recognition of the humanity of the slaves, of their distinctly moral qualities, occurred at some point in the previous nine months.

There are further traces of this recognition, throughout the epilogue. In her final journal entry, she writes that Isabella had told her, "I must never allow myself to grow old in a country that is unkind to me" (p. 129). Isabella had been referring to England, and Emily at that point suggests that she is in the West Indies due to Isabella's "urgings", which led her to leave England and, ultimately, to her catastrophic situation: "Lucky Isabella that she did not live to witness the consequences of her urgings" (p. 129). This is reinscribed in the epilogue: "Do not (Isabella had reminded her) grow old in a place that is unkind to you. They were kind, they journeyed up the hill and brought her food" (p. 182). Kindness is therefore ascribed to the former slaves, confirming that the recognition is not limited to Stella alone. There is, importantly, also a significant change in her self-understanding in relation to the slaves. During the night after the stillbirth which the epilogue narrates, Emily says a prayer, "dedicating the prayer to those, like herself, whose only journeys were uprootings" (p. 180). During one of her earlier observations of the slaves on the plantation she had noted "the rootlessness of these people who have been torn from their native soil" (p. 71). That "those, like herself" might refer

³⁸ The question of the veracity of the boundary between the human and the animal, which is traditionally understood as the limit of ethics, is both important and interesting. It is however beyond the scope of Emily's horizon of understanding, and therefore does not impinge upon this reading.

to the slaves, to a feature which they have in common with her, stands in vivid contrast with her earlier views of racial superiority and difference.

In view of such a dramatic change in Emily, it is interesting that throughout the epilogue this recognition is neither recounted nor recollected. There are only these traces, the changes that we observe in her. It is, nonetheless, possible to infer what served as the catalysts for this change. There is, to begin with, the complete reversal of her situation. Of itself, I noted, a change in material circumstances would not lead to a change of mind: it was seen that in the midst of the turmoil, Emily maintained her racist views. It is for this reason that the bond between Emily and Stella which I noted earlier is important: not only is it a manifestation of the change in Emily's understanding, but it is also one of the main causes. Emily's situation at the close of her journal is one of acute emotional pain, and, I suggest, the bond between the two women was able to form due to the intense doubt and distress that Mr Wilson's return caused for Emily's racist position. The reversal of Emily's circumstances therefore played the crucial role of creating the possibility for the connection between her and Stella to flourish. That their relationship was the main cause of the recognition explains the emotional connection and Emily's correlative concern. After all, the friendship with Stella, being contrary to Emily's racist ideology, was neither acknowledged nor could be held in tandem with it. Additionally, this understanding of the recognition concurs with the closing sentences of the epilogue. Mourning the loss of her child, desiring death but knowing that she must live on, "that, in all likelihood, she would have to witness the dying of the sun come dusk", Emily's source of comfort is thinking of Stella: "She remembered. Journeying up the hill to Hawthorn Cottage. With her friend. Stella. Dear Stella" (p. 184).

There is definite growth in Emily's narrative in *Cambridge*, which adds an important depth to her character, showing her as responsible for her earlier, racist position. That is to say, her surpassing of her ethical failure (and ideological position) reveals her (circumscribed) responsibility for it. This is a significant growth which suggests some similarities with Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. For one,

instrumental to the positive development in both novels is the forming of relationships that were previously avoided – such as between Kambili and her grandfather. That the characters’ also learn through their emotional assessment of their situation is a pattern that is similar to what we saw in *Sea of Poppies* between Deeti and Kalua. Deeti’s recognition of Kalua as a fellow human being, as equal with her, is brought about through her emotional response.³⁹ Stumbling across Kalua being humiliated and violated, his experience resonates powerfully with her own rape on her wedding night. Unexpectedly for Deeti, Kalua shifts through this resonance from being viewed as a shadowy member of a lower caste, to being like her. In each of these scenarios, purely intellectual disruptions alone are insufficient: it is the emotional distress of being unmoored and the bond that forms between Emily and Stella that enables her recognition of a common humanity with the slaves.

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, it is that which separates Phillips’ work from Adichie’s and Ghosh’s that is more significant. As has been seen, the main text of *Cambridge* is marked by a distinct lack of recognition despite a couple of possible moments for one. Although the reader, due to the juxtaposition of the narratives, can recognise similarities between them Emily and Cambridge themselves are constrained by their discourses. Instead of recognising their commonalities and the common humanity that underpins them, they inversely participate in the oppression of each other. Even in the (marginal) epilogue, where we can see that Emily has dramatically changed, recognition is still conspicuously absent. The effect is precisely to sharpen the lack of recognition that has gone before and, through Emily’s painful success, to emphasise her and Cambridge’s failure which has constituted the majority of the narrative. Phillips can therefore be seen to represent in *Cambridge*

³⁹ It is interesting that it is a particular kind of emotion that seems to be effective for causing the recognition. Emily feels fear of both Cambridge and Christiania, but this does not result in any change to her understanding. Although this would likely be context specific, it is possible to speculate that this is due to what the different emotions communicate. As Nussbaum (2001a) argues, fear correlates to danger: something which we value is threatened. The natural response to fear is thus defensive, as indeed we saw with Emily. It seems to follow that what is required for emotions to bring recognition is a more positive affirmation of the value of something previously un- or undervalued, rather than the threatening of something already valued. This seems to be the case with Emily. Her fear of Cambridge and Christiania results in her designating them as mad, but the positive bond with Stella, which introduces something new of value, results in recognition. The exception to this would be when fear highlights to oneself a discrepancy between what one feels one should not fear, and what one in reality does.

ethical failure: a failure that is in part due to the constraining effects of discourse and which, I want to suggest, has been effectively conveyed through the use of unreliable narrators.

The close connection that I have detailed between Emily's unreliability as a narrator and her failure to recognise Cambridge as an equal human being therefore warrants some further consideration. James Phelan (2005), in his study on the ethics of character narration, presents what I consider an accurate taxonomy of unreliable narration. He argues for three axes of unreliability. "Narrators," he writes, "perform three main roles – reporting, interpreting, and evaluating... They may, therefore, deviate from the implied author's views in one or more of these roles simultaneously, sequentially, or intermittently" (p. 50). The axes of unreliability correspond to these narrator functions: "unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of characters, facts, and events; unreliable reading (or interpreting) occurs along the axis of knowledge and perception; and unreliable regarding (or evaluating) occurs along the axis of ethics and evaluation" (p. 50). Phelan proceeds to argue for a further distinction along each of these axes: either the narrator's words need be rejected and a more satisfactory account constructed by the reader, or the narrator's words need to be supplemented (pp. 50-51). In other words, the narrator is either unreliable in the sense of reporting (knowingly or not) something that is false and misleading the reader, or they are unreliable in that what they tell us is true, but incomplete. In combining these aspects Phelan creates his taxonomy of six kinds of unreliability: "misreporting, misreading, misevaluating – or what I will call misregarding", each of which, except the first, correlates to when the narrator is incorrect and their words are rejected; and "underreporting, underreading, and underregarding" (p. 51), each of which, except the first, corresponds to when the narrator is correct, but their words need to be supplemented (pp. 51-52).

Phelan's discussion in which he develops this taxonomy is concerned with the ethics of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*, which I will consider in the next chapter. His discussion is useful here, however, as it enables a more accurate grasp of the kind of unreliability presented by Emily and Cambridge. Both of them are largely reliable along the axis of facts and events. When Emily tells us

that Stella requested that she be called *Aunt* Stella, there is no doubt that this occurred. Similarly with Cambridge, when he is retaken as a slave there is no doubt that this happened, nor that the Captain stole his money. It is along the axes of interpretation and evaluation that both Emily and Cambridge are distinctly unreliable. Emily's evaluation of Stella's request is a case of misregarding due to a mistaken value system: the reader knows that Stella is trying to be friendly, while Emily evaluates it as a bastardisation of proper English categories. And so also Cambridge, in objecting to his re-enslavement on the basis that he is a virtual Englishman, similarly displays a mistaken value system. My attention has mainly been occupied by Emily's pervasive misreading. One of the most overt examples is her interpretation of Mr Brown's change of behaviour as reflecting "a profound change in the heart and soul of Mr Brown" which she can "only assume" is due to "guilt" (p. 82). While, as Phelan points out (p. 51), misreading can be due to a misregarding – which is possibly the case, as I noted before, with some of Cambridge's assessments of Christiania whom he rigidly interprets through the lens of a European, rational Christianity and so denies the possibility that she is a practitioner of Obeah – Emily's misreading is due to her dislocation from herself which allows her unacknowledged racism to masquerade as objectivity, and her naive gullibility. As a result, the story depicts her increasing acceptance of the ideology of the plantation.

What emerges then is that due to their unreliability, narrators such as Emily and Cambridge are particularly suited to exploring ethical failure in a nuanced way. Unreliable narrators dramatise a failure of knowledge (one is tempted, in cases of misreporting, underreading and underregarding, to say misrecognition) along the axes I have noted, and that failure can often be an ethical one: not only overtly as in cases of misregarding, but also more implicitly in misreading. This is what we have seen with Emily and Cambridge and their failure of recognition. However, through fragmenting the narrative voice, Phillips has further managed to capitalise on this feature of the unreliable narrator. Refusing the representation of a positive recognition, even in the epilogue, Phillips has succeeded in crystallising the focus of *Cambridge* on ethical failure in a manner that contrasts with a novel like *Purple Hibiscus* where the focus is less on the error than on the process of growing out of it.

It is, finally, necessary to briefly consider Part Three of the novel – the official report of the murder – which returns us to the epilogue and asks why Phillips relates the traces of Emily’s recognition in the language of a modern, much more reliable, narrator. In an interview with Caryl Phillips, Graham Swift (2009) picks up on this and quizzes Phillips on the “sense of a language that can talk about things suddenly bursting through Emily’s own language in which she can’t” (p. 16). Swift turns this towards Phillips’ own sense of being a writer, but the statement can still be seen to broach this question. Swift’s own suggestion that Emily cannot speak about such things is appealing: it seems to fit with the unreliability of her earlier narration and, after all, she does not expressly reveal her new perspective – it is recounted for us. This is challenged by a large portion of the epilogue being narrated in free indirect discourse. Emily is seen to be aware of her new perspective and, as I have shown, she is aware of it as maturation: she is no longer a tottering foal, no longer immature.

Instead, what seems to be a likely answer concerns the third narrative, and brings us back to the historical, intertextual details that I discussed earlier. Following Paul Sharrad’s discussion of the novel, Ledent comments that the third narrative in *Cambridge* is the “most likely to survive in real life” (cited in 2002, pp. 102-103). What Ledent and Sharrad suggest is that the kind of grossly exaggerated and biased report represented by the third narrative, which is almost an exact duplication of an actual report, is the most likely record of a story like Cambridge’s to have survived. Consequently, it would shape our understanding of history. It “thus raises the issue of what is eventually included into history” (Ledent, p. 103) and casts Phillips’ intervention as involving more than a recuperation of historical texts into memory, bringing his work into proximity with Ghosh’s interest in excavating forgotten and suppressed histories. Emily’s and Cambridge’s narratives would come to be understood as important parts of the story which the historical record of the report elides. As the extensive citing of historical travelogues and slave testimonies demonstrates, however, the texts represented by Emily and Cambridge’s narratives do survive (though perhaps not as frequently as the kind represented by Part Three since they are published and disseminated less frequently). The significance of Emily’s prologue and epilogue is that they fall entirely beyond this purview of archival

history, and it is precisely as such that they work to add a further (fictional) layer to the historically unspoken in the narrative. They respond to those gaps in and connections between the narratives which emerge due to their proximity. It is this distinct quality which is marked by the use of the modern narrator.

III

The third narrative in *Cambridge* functions as the main historical moment around which Phillips' technique of pastiche and montage recuperates archival texts for the purposes of memory, and, negotiating the ethics of memory, marks an intervention into the question of the historical record itself, which is supplemented by the modern narrator of the prologue and epilogue. *Crossing the River* functions according to a similar structure. Eckstein notes that two of the four parts that constitute *Crossing the River* deploy techniques of pastiche and montage. Part One, "The Pagan Coast", draws on "letters by repatriated African-American slaves" which are collected in Bell I. Wiley's *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Eckstein, p. 113). Hamilton's journal that is Part Three, "Crossing the River", "quotes verbatim from the *Journal of a Slave Trader* by John Newton" (p. 114). Eckstein's purpose in noting this is to show that Phillips' ethical and political project as he has outlined it is not isolated to *Cambridge*, but rather characterises much of his oeuvre (p. 114). What I find of particular interest though, is the way in which quoting verbatim from the journal of Newton sets up Part Three as the historical anchor, as it were, of the novel. It will be seen that in distinction to the earlier novel, Phillips constructs a more intricate web of contrasts and similarities, with a slightly different effect. While there is then an extension of Phillips' engagement with the ethical questions of history and memory, the manner of engaging these undergoes some salient alterations.

One of the more overt differences from the earlier novel is the use of section titles; the journal of Hamilton, for instance, is marked as pivotal not only by being a direct citation of an historical text –of which only an informed reader would be aware – but by sharing the title of the novel (though this has also been differently interpreted and will be returned to). Further, whereas *Cambridge* has a unity of

character and location with a fragmentation of perspective, the narratives that constitute *Crossing the River* are more diverse, being made up of characters that never meet and are spread across three centuries. Set in the late nineteenth century, Part One, "The Pagan Coast", alternates between the letters of Nash Williams to his former master Edward Williams, and Edward's own search for Nash in Liberia when the letters cease to be sent. Part Two, "West", is also set in the nineteenth century and tells the story of Martha Randolph's escape from her slave owners and her flight to the west. Jumping a hundred years back into the previous century, Part Three is the journal of the slave trader Hamilton, while Part Four, "Somewhere in England", transpires during the second World War and is made up of fragments from the journal of Joyce, an Englishwoman who falls in love with Travis, an African-American GI stationed in England. Such a diverse range of characters is united, on the one hand, in that they are all part of the African diaspora. On the other hand, and more immediately, they are all connected through the voice of the prologue and epilogue, the "guilty father" (p. 237) who, "for two hundred and fifty years" (p. 236) has listened to the "many-tongued chorus" (p. 237) of that diaspora.

A further difference between the two novels is located in their chronology. In *Cambridge*, as Eckstein points out, there is a covert disruption of chronological time by the source texts beneath the surface of otherwise chronologically sequential narratives. This disruption enters the narratives themselves in *Crossing the River*. Not only does their ordering disrupt temporal linearity, but the only narrative that progresses internally in a linear fashion is Hamilton's journal: a strict chronology which is significant in its contrast to the other narratives. It is notable that Pichler (2011), apparently independently of Eckstein's earlier study, interprets this disruption of chronology through the same theoretical frame deployed by Eckstein for his reading of Phillips' use of source texts. Where *Cambridge* could be described as effecting the recuperation of historical texts for the purposes of memory (as can *Crossing the River*, considering the citation of source material), Pichler argues that the disruption of narrative chronology in *Crossing the River* dramatises the difference between history and memory. History relates to the past through trying to construct the details and connections between discreet moments, creating a comprehensive vision of the past; memory, as it were, is more selective,

retaining “from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive” (cited in (Pichler, p. 2)). That is, it relates to the past through the present, as that which retains significance for the present, and as such is characterised by the disruption of linear time. This is dramatised particularly in Martha’s narrative through the combination of different voices and tenses. Martha’s present circumstances are narrated in the past tense by an extra-diegetic narrator, while her memories are narrated in the present tense by herself as an intra-diegetic narrator. The effect is to make the memories more immediate than the present, demonstrating something of the working of memory (see also Low (p. 136)).

The common ethical preoccupations with history and memory that can be noted across the two novels are therefore explored more overtly in the later one through these more surface features of narrative voice and structure. Significantly, the narrators in *Crossing the River* also tend to be more reliable than both Emily and Cambridge. While a negotiation of characters’ misreading and misregarding is required, such as with Nash William’s assessment of his position in Liberia in his early letters and Joyce’s blindness to the politics of race in the United States and Britain, the misreading is not as comprehensive or pervasive as in *Cambridge*. Most significantly, Martha’s narrative is reliable, which contrasts importantly with the unreliability of the narrative to which it is closely connected: Hamilton’s journal (which will be seen, together with Martha’s narrative, to constitute the ethical and interpretative core of the novel). What will emerge is that while the unreliable, multiple narratives of *Cambridge* emphasise ethical failure and correspondingly shape the novel’s ethical sense, the increased reliability in *Crossing the River* is important for its more positive ethical stance. A number of critics, following Phillips’ own comments on the novel (Davison, 2009, p. 21), have noted that *Crossing the River* conveys a positive link between the characters, an “affirmative connection” (Low, p. 123). My examination of the novel will concur with this, but what I draw out is the importance to this of a moment of ethical failure, presenting another instance of radical evil: it is the interplay of Martha’s reliable narrative and Hamilton’s unreliable one – closely connected to the “guilty father” and linked to the narratives of Nash and Travis (p. 237; cf p.2) – that conveys this positive affirmation. The

concern with a lack of recognition, with the ethical failure of not recognising the common humanity of the slaves is thus important in the later novel as well: it functions as a critical, enabling (and simultaneously undermining) counterpoint to the positive affirmation. The affirmation is only possible because of the ethical failure, an intertwining that is evident in the closing lines of the epilogue:

There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return. A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my beloved children. *Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl.* But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved. (p. 237)

The father and the slave trader (designated by the italics), linked by a “shameful intercourse” (p. 1), create the condition in which the affirmative connection, their surviving and being loved, is asserted. I will consider these final lines in more depth later.

We are first introduced to the figure of the guilty father in the prologue, which narrates for us the “shameful intercourse” of selling his three children: “My Nash. My Martha. My Travis” (p. 1). The opening paragraph is marked by the intertwining of voices that will be more fully dramatised in the novel. Interrupting the father’s narrative is an italicised voice that narrates the purchasing of the three children from the perspective of the slave trader. So we are told, “We watched a while. And then approached. *Approached by a quiet fellow.* The children only. I jettisoned them at this point, where the tributary stumbles and swims out in all directions to meet the sea. *Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl*” (p. 1). Only when the reader gets to Part Three are these italicised lines given a source: the journal of the slave trader Hamilton. From the first (and to the last) the African father’s voice is inexorably intertwined with that of the slave trader, linked by the “shameful intercourse” – a carefully chosen phrase, “intercourse” conveying the intimacy of mutual exchange and communication while denoting its original meaning of trade or commerce.⁴⁰ As a result, Hamilton’s journal cannot be read without the interpretative overlay of this shame, a conjunction that is only more poignant since the journal is written in the mode of an emotionless, meticulous recording of a trade journey. Similarly, the father’s affirmation of his lost children is haunted by the guilt and shame

⁴⁰ <http://oed.com/view/Entry/97677?rskey=Diiay&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> (accessed 27-10-2011)

of this intercourse. It is after this trade that the father tells us a “chorus of a common memory began to haunt me”, the chorus within which the voices of Nash, Martha and Travis are located (p. 1).

In her discussion of the novel, Gail Low offers the following succinct summary of its main thematic concerns.

Crossing the River grapples with the questions of kinship, social memory, and the renewal of identity; it establishes a unity that is at once fictive and performative, and yet also necessary and real. Furthermore, *Crossing the River's* inclusive understanding of diaspora is one that offers an alternative conception of freedom and belonging across and within racial lines. (p. 132)

The two main thematic concerns that are identified here, kinship/belonging and the African Diaspora, are indeed central to the novel; Ledent, in her study of the novel, concurs.⁴¹ Low emphasises the thematic of kinship, arguing that the painful loss of and desire for affective connections can be understood to constitute a poetics of diaspora (p. 123), while Ledent emphasises Phillips' non-essentialist understanding of the African Diaspora. These two themes will occupy much of my own analysis, though I will suggest a slightly different understanding than what Low and Ledent put forward.

“The Pagan Coast” is concerned, as Lows puts it, with an “exploration of the relationship between masters and slaves as a form of kinship” (p. 132). We are first introduced to Edward Williams, “the son of a wealthy tobacco planter” who as a young man had inherited the estate, “and with it the sum total of three hundred slaves” (p. 13). Sharing his father's “aversion to the system which had allowed his fortunes to multiply”, he began to educate his slaves, and upon learning of the American Colonization Society, considered it “an ideal opportunity to divest himself of the burden, or at least some part of the burden, of being a slave owner” (p. 13), a title that he considers as “contrary to his Christian beliefs” (p. 14). In this way he becomes involved with the Society, and begins to “repatriate” his former slaves to Liberia, with the goal of civilising and evangelising the local people (p. 8). When we meet him for the first time, he has just received the distressing news that Nash Williams, one of

⁴¹ As with his analysis of *Cambridge*, Bewes is at odds with the critical commentary on *Crossing the River*, but this will be considered later.

the most promising of those sent to Liberia, “had disappeared from the known world” (p. 7), and his response is to journey to Liberia in search of him.

From the first, Edward is presented by the extra-diegetic narrator as benevolent, as someone who departs from the norm by taking “the unusual initiative” of educating his slaves (p. 13). As with Emily in *Cambridge*, it quickly becomes apparent that his stated thoughts and objectives are deceptive. Edward’s racism (and nominal rejection of slavery) is evidenced not only in the discourse of civilising Africa but when, for instance, he describes Nash possessively as “the most successful of his Christian Blacks” (p. 14). Although later possessives of this sort could be ascribed to pride in one whom Edward considers a protégé, as well as due to the sexual relationship that is revealed between them, here Nash is only one of many “Christian Blacks” who are “his”. More undermining of his benevolent self-representations are his motives and ambivalence. Edward is not entirely free of his father’s duplicity in finding slavery repulsive yet using it to multiply his wealth (a duplicity that will be evident with Hamilton as well). Low notes that, “[Edward’s] refinement and taste are a product of the proceeds of the slave trade” (p. 133). Edward also continues to enjoy his “unrivalled wealth”, despite limiting this enjoyment somewhat by resisting the temptation to “premature retirement” (Phillips, p. 13). Additionally, we observe that Edward is not interested in educating and repatriating his slaves out of concern for them, but only to ease his conscience and to assist in “removing a cause of increasing social stress” while advancing the civilization of Africa “by the return of her descendants, who were now blessed with rational Christian minds” (p. 9). In short, as Low puts it, “Edward is far from the benevolent and disinterested philanthropist that he makes himself out to be” (p. 133).

There are hints in these early sections of the narrative of Edward’s homosexual relationships with his slaves, which is only fully revealed later. We are told that Edward’s wife, who “sadly... was no more” (p. 14) (we only learn later that she committed suicide), would have been “gravely suspicious of the motives which lay behind his projected expedition” and that she had “slowly come to tolerate the strange behavior and desires of her husband”, a comment which seems to refer to his philanthropy

but is made ambiguous due to the doubt raised by the surrounding references (pp. 12, 14). For instance when Edward receives news that Nash is putting his health in danger by working in the rain, he “secretly” pens a plea that he not continue to do so. The narrator cites for us “a portion” of the letter that contained “words of wisdom” (p. 10), which seem relatively banal. However the narrator notes that “this letter was uncovered by Edward’s wife, Amelia, and not conveyed” (p. 11). Why Edward’s wife would have been suspicious of his motives in seeking out Nash, or what else in the letter caused her to prevent it from being sent, is not stated. We later come to know that the reason is his sexual relationship with Nash. At this point in the narrative, however, we know only that Edward (and the ostensibly objective narrator) is concerned with presenting a particular portrait of himself as fitting the nineteenth century ideal of a gentleman. Although Edward is not as he is presented to be, it is not possible to discount the bond between him and Nash. He does, after all, defy all advice and undergo a perilous journey to find him. There is still a degree of self-interest: he goes “not simply to discover the truth surrounding his Nash, but in order to confirm that his life’s work, and more importantly his own life, had been of some worth” (p. 14). Nevertheless his concern for Nash is real, and the journey of self-discovery is crucial to the poignant conclusion of the section.

Much of the space in “The Pagan Coast” is taken up by the five letters that Nash writes to Edward from Liberia. Low notes that Nash is “reared in the image of his master”, and as such shares his racism (p. 133). Addressing him as his “Beloved Benefactor” (p. 17) and his “Dear Father” (p. 23), Nash can be seen to at first share Edward’s conviction of the need to civilise and evangelise the “heathens” (p. 19). Accordingly, in his first letter he writes in gratitude to Edward who was “kind enough to take me, a foolish child, from my parents and bring me up in your own dwelling as something more akin to son than servant” (p. 21). The resonance here with Cambridge’s gratitude at being taken as a slave is striking. Nash continues: “Had I been permitted simply to run about, I would today be dwelling in the same robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of my fellow blacks” (p. 21). Though Edward’s interest was seemingly not, as Low puts it, “to grant ex-slaves men [sic] some measure of freedom from racism” (p. 133), Nash views Liberia as “the star in the East for the free coloured man. It is truly

our home" (p. 18). It is a place where "we may sit under the palm tree and enjoy the same privileges as our white bretheren in America" (p. 18). That this is false and that Liberia, at least in Monrovia, is marked by the same racism and white privilege as America is later revealed by Edward's arrival. Nash nevertheless calls Liberia a paradise to the end, though his reasons for this, as well as his opinion on other crucial matters, will alter significantly.

Five years after his first letter, in the third of the series that constitutes his part of the narrative, we begin to see Nash's understanding of the world shifting. Writing about the belief among the locals that sudden death is due to bewitching, Nash describes a practise of consulting "the grand devil man of the village" to ascertain who "bewitched the person that died". He writes: "This person will then be fed some poison in order to dispatch him for his wrongful deed. This appears to me not an entirely unjust method of administering justice, and one from which we of the so-called civilised world might learn something valuable" (p. 31). Nash's language here intimates his confusion. The criminal is identified and executed by the "devil man", a description congruent with European judgements of traditional African religion at the time. Yet this is immediately inverted by Nash calling the practise just, and one from which America and Europe could learn. A new assessment of traditional practises is beginning to emerge amidst the familiar judgements and interpretations of them. What is crucial is the questioning indicated by Nash's prefacing of the "civilized world" with "so-called". This uncertainty as to America and Europe holding the title of "civilized" will become central to his last letters.

The letter in which this slightly confused questioning occurs is the longest in the series. The likely reason is his joy at finally receiving a letter from Edward. His previous letters had gone unanswered, making him all the more joyful to receive news. He is perplexed as to why he has received no other response, and asks, "Why, dear Father, you chose to ignore my previous letters, you do not indicate. I must assume that this represents you either not receiving them, or your finding their contents so ignorant and poor in expression that you rightly deemed them unworthy of response" (p. 29). It is

possible to surmise that part of the unresponsiveness is due to Edward considering Nash's letters "full of the usual childish requests for tools, seeds, money and other necessities of life" (p. 7) (the description of the items as "necessities of life" undermining Edward's interpretation of them as "childish"). Yet we later learn that his wife has also been "destroying the colored man's letters" because of Edward and Nash's sexual relationship (p. 56). The reasons for Edward's silence are therefore multiple, but what registers in this letter – and in all the others – is Nash's pain at what he reads as rejection. At this point he is still able to de-emphasise the hurt, suggesting self-deprecatingly that his letters are "unworthy of response". This soon passes, and in his next letter he writes, "Why your heart remains hard against me is a mystery which has caused me emotions of great distress" (p. 38).

Nash Williams' final letter is the most severe. Written while Edward is at sea in response to Nash's previous letter "making it plain that he had no desire ever to hear again from his former master, and informing him that his own communications would now cease" (p. 8), it emphasises his pain at Edward's rejection and makes explicit his rejection in turn of Edward's view of Africa and Africans. Having taken three wives, Nash is living "the life of an African". He declares that Liberia is the "finest country for the colored man" because of the freedom it offers:

We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America. Far from corrupting my soul, the Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life. (pp. 61-61)

We see here the complete inversion of Nash's conception of the "garb of ignorance". In contrast to his first letter, his tutelage under Edward and at college in Virginia did not liberate him from ignorance but rather wrapped him in it, a condition which Liberia provided the opportunity to cast off. Also unlike his previous discarding of ignorance, his agency is here retained: Liberia only provided the opportunity, Nash was responsible for grasping it. There are two points about which he has gained enlightenment, and consequently repudiated Edward's view. First, is the recognition that there is no liberty for "the colored man" in America: the "your" both distances Nash from America

and implies that it belongs to white people, in so far as Africans are denied an equal place. He also, however, repudiates the ostensible purpose for being sent to Liberia in the first place. He writes that the “school is no more, and shall never again occupy a position of authority in any settlement of which I am a part”, going on to assert the futility of the missionary enterprise: “The truth is, our religion, in its purist and least diluted form, can never take root in this country” (p. 62). Although he still considers himself a Christian, he feels that he is “bound to an African existence”. Nash must therefore “suspend my faith and... choose to live the life of an African” since Christianity has no place in Africa (p. 62). This view is problematised by Adichie. It is no surprise, however, that in the opening of the letter Nash expresses his concern that Edward will think him “corrupted... into this heathen whom you barely recognize” (p. 61).

Nash’s criticism of America and the purpose behind his journey to Liberia makes it all the more striking that he is so intensely distraught at Edward’s seeming rejection of him. In his penultimate letter, he writes, “Why have you forsaken me?” (p. 42), the full significance of which will be turned to later. It is clear that Nash’s letters convey his increasing pain at the separation and silence between the two of them, steadily building to this despairing question and his final rejection of Edward. As noted, his bitterness is explained by the revelation in Edward’s narrative of the sexual nature of their relationship (pp. 55-56), which, coupled with Nash’s inability to share his past life with his African wives (p. 42), bestows an immense significance on Edward for his emotional life. The sexual nature of the relationship emerges late in Nash’s narrative, in his final letter: “I find the process [of writing to Edward] humiliating, and I fail to see what hurt I ever inflicted upon you that could justify such a cruel abandonment of your past intimate, namely myself” (p. 60). Throughout the letters we learn that Edward filled the role of a father to Nash, having taken him out of his original family. Indeed, even in his final rejection of Edward, Nash calls him “my father” (p. 63). This leads Low to comment that the revelation of the sexual details of the relationship renders Nash’s expressions of affection “somewhat chilling” (p. 134). Low interprets the relationship as one of paedophilia, since Edward confesses to craving the “unconditional love of a child” (Phillips, p. 55). It is not clear though that this is the case.

Edward tells us that he lavished “an excess of affection upon a new retainer” (p. 56) only once Nash had left, suggesting that what he craves is sheer devotion and obedience such as we see evidenced in Nash’s early letters. Regardless of the question of age, it is clear that such devotion is the result of an abuse of the power differential between Edward and Nash that, coupled with the role which Edward plays as Nash’s surrogate father, casts the relationship as “an abuse and perversion of that kinship” (Low, p. 135).⁴² As Ledent, who views this relationship more positively, notes, “Such fractures [of the family caused by slavery] mean... that surrogate ties, very often of a cross-cultural kind, are woven to replace the genuine ones” (p. 128). I therefore agree with Low that “Edward’s betrayal” is “a betrayal of trust and kinship” (p. 135).

It is poignant then that at the close of this section of the novel, Edward and his life’s work – the validity of which he had set out to ascertain – is not only rejected by Nash, but by the extra-diegetic narrator. After Nash’s death Edward arrives at his final settlement with another former slave, Madison, as a guide, and is shocked by what he finds. The settlement is a small village made up of a “litter of brown cones” (p. 68), that is, a collection of huts which Edward views as “straw grass hovel[s]” (p. 69). Unable to “disguise his true feelings of disgust” (p. 69) he cannot bring himself to enter Nash’s final home. He turns to Madison in search of help in understanding what he sees: “But Madison had about his person an air of nonchalance. And then it struck Edward with a terrible force. He was alone. He had been abandoned” (p. 69). He tries to sing a hymn to calm himself, but the words fail to form. The narrator continues,

Still, Edward continued to *sing* his hymn. The natives looked on and wondered what evil spirits had populated this poor man’s soul and dragged him down to such a level of abasement. Their hearts began to swell with the pity that one feels for a fellow being who has lost both his way and his sense of purpose. This strange old white man. Madison turned away. (p. 69)

In these final lines, the focalisation shifts. Having closely narrated Edward’s perspective until this point, the narrator suddenly switches to that of “the natives”. It is a narrative move that echoes (for the second time in this thesis) Achebe’s ending of *Things Fall Apart*. Except that it does not reveal the

⁴² This is, of course, an abuse in addition to that of slavery itself.

violence of colonial discourse. Instead, it shows a recognition by the natives of a common existence, a commonality refused by Edward, and simultaneously serves to reject him. In his final letter, which Madison delivered personally, Nash rejected Edward and his purposes. At this point, Madison refuses to ally himself with Edward's inability to accept and understand what he sees. Then, in the shift of focalisation, the narrator also abandons Edward, conveying the Africans' pity for Edward's despair, emphasising the failure of his sense of purpose, and that, like Nash, he is alone.

It must be emphasised that this conclusion to the section is not only a criticism of the missionary/colonial enterprise in Africa. This is certainly a part of it despite, as Low points out, Nash's rejection of it being framed in colonial terms of "ethnic absolutism" (p. 134). It is also more than the conclusion and judgement of Edward's abuse of the surrogate kinship relationship between himself and Nash (and other former slaves, such as Madison). All these things – the loneliness that Nash experiences throughout, his inability to connect properly with his wives, the failure of Edward's purposes, of the missionary enterprise on which he sent Nash, and the judgement of his abuse of his slaves – serve to dramatise and support the African father's argument: "There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return" (p. 2). Nash tries to return, first as a missionary and then as one living "an African life". Although he has some marginal success, his painful longing for Edward shows that he is never at ease, unable to fully belong.

In this way, then, the first narrative introduces the main thematic of longing for kinship, for meaningful affective connections, and reiterates the guilty father's perspective on the diaspora. That this first part contains the perspective of both a slave owner and a former slave is significant as each is developed further in the next two narratives. Hamilton's narrative will pick up the duplicitous attitude to slavery that we noted in both Edward and his father, while Martha's narrative responds to Nash's grateful glossing of his separation from his family at the hands of Edward, problematising it and more explicitly confirming the father's verdict that there is no return. By the end Nash has

undergone a complete reversal in his understanding of Edward's influence on his life. Martha's narrative extends this, dramatising the "eduring pain" (Low, p. 135) of the loss of kinship.

The present time of Martha's narrative, though narrated in the past tense, is the final night of her life. Having been left in Denver by black pioneers journeying to California in search of a better life, "a new life without having to pay no heed to the white man and his ways" (pp. 73-74) – note the resonance with Nash's rejection of America – Martha is old, frail and alone without shelter in the biting cold of winter. Huddling in a doorway along the main street, a white woman finds her and provides her with shelter for the night during which she dies. The majority of her narrative is filled with the recollections of her life, the memories of the hopeful and painful moments that filled it: the breaking up of her family on the auction block, the continual search for new kinships, for affective connections, and her limited success in this quest.

Through her memories, vividly narrated in the first person present tense, we learn about her family, of her husband Lucas and her daughter Eliza Mae, and how they were split up on the auction block in Virginia. Sold to a family that relocates to Kansas, Martha runs away when she learns she is to be sold back across the Missouri river to Virginia, "across the river to Hell" (p. 80). She escapes successfully and settles in Dodge, finding a new husband, Chester, and a surrogate daughter Lucy. For a time she enjoys a new contentment, "not on account of no emancipation proclamation, but on account of my Chester" (p. 84), but her life is again traumatically disrupted when Chester is murdered by gamblers that he had exposed for cheating. Needing to leave town, Lucy and Martha move their laundry business to Leavenworth where Lucy finds a husband and subsequently heads west to San Francisco. Not much later, Martha also joins a group of pioneers and seeks to join her, hoping to find Eliza Mae there. She is too old and frail to complete the journey, however, and the pioneers are forced to leave her in Denver, where she passes her final hours.

Despite the happiness that Martha finds with Chester for "ten long years" (p. 84), her narrative centres on the pain of the repeated breaking of affective ties. Low argues that the trauma of the

splitting of her original family organises Martha's entire life and thus also the narrative. Her "connection with [her family], her desire for them" is transformative (Low, p. 135), with the result that all "of Martha's journeys are also journeys in search of family, and journeys that create and perform kinship ties" (p. 136). What Martha's story therefore represents "is a diaspora of connectedness via the pain of original loss" (p. 136). Although perhaps more immediately traumatic than the guilty father's pain, Martha's quest for connection is not marred by the guilt of betrayal and is for Low "a more uplifting example of what is possible" (p. 135), a positive instance of affirmative connections.

Martha's longing for her daughter has an additional significance. Moments before passing away, she dreams that "she had travelled on west to California, clutching her bundle of clothing. Once there she was met by Eliza Mae, who was now a tall, sturdy colored woman of some social standing" (p. 93). But things are not as they should be. Her daughter is going by her former mistress's name, Cleo, which Ledent notes reflects the destructive effect of slavery on kinship relations, how it infiltrates the unconscious (p. 128). More significantly, in the dream it was soon "time for Martha to leave, but her daughter simply forbade her mother to return east." Martha, weeping in response, reflects:

She would not be going any place. She would never again head east. To Kansas. To Virginia. Or to beyond. She had a westward soul which had found its natural-born home in the bosom of her daughter. (p. 94)

"Beyond" Virginia, of course, lies Africa. What is implied by the failure of Nash's return to Africa is here reiterated more overtly: there is no return, "She would never again head east". The "natural born home" of her soul – which though "natural" has also to be "found", a description that supports Low's and Ledent's reading of the performative, earned nature of kinship in the novel – lies to the west, in "the bosom of her daughter". That is, in the future, in the "new trees" of which the father speaks in the prologue (p. 2).

Low argues that Martha's narrative, the "diaspora of connectedness via the pain of original loss", presents the "central theme of *Crossing the River*" (p. 136). Her reason is the narrative's privileged

position in the novel. Not only does Martha's story lie "at the novel's heart" (p. 136), but she also remembers the "shameful intercourse" on the beach. When Martha first begins to remember her past, we read:

Through some atavistic mist, Martha peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off, a ship. Her journey had been a long one. But now the sun had set. Her course was run. *Father, why hast thou forsaken me?* (p. 73)

Although the fact that she remembers her "arrival in Virginia", prior to her "teen years", suggests that she was born in Africa, the "trembling girl" is not her – at least not literally so. In Denver after the civil war, Martha here reaches back more than a hundred years, atavistically remembering the "shameful intercourse" of the father selling his children, an event which in Hamilton's narrative we learn occurred on the 19th May, 1753 (p. 124). That the trembling girl is not Martha is in one sense beside the point: the betrayal by the father of his children has a synecdochal relationship with the slave trade and the African diaspora which it initiated. There is therefore a sense in which the trembling girl is indeed Martha, and every other African woman sold into slavery or descended from slaves. Nevertheless, what is significant here is that Martha echoes the guilty father. For in addition to remembering the shameful intercourse, she also hears the same chorus: "Voices from the past. Some she recognised. Some she did not. But, nevertheless, she listened" (p. 79). Centrally placed, and linked in this way to the presiding voice of the father, Martha's positive diversion from him becomes, for Low, central to the novel's meaning, to the sense of affirmative connections (p. 136).

This seems to me to be correct, so far as it goes. What has been neglected by critics, however, are the connections between Martha's narrative and those of both Hamilton and Nash. I will consider her links to Nash further on. Her connection with Hamilton is twofold, one direct and one indirect. On the one hand, she remembers the "ship standing off" from the beach where the trembling girl waits. Yet, on the other hand, her connection with the guilty father also links her, less directly, to Hamilton. The result is that rather than Martha holding the "heart" of the novel, as Low suggests (p. 136), the centre

is crucially held by two closely linked, contrary narratives: Martha and Hamilton together, joined by a common memory.

Hamilton's narrative, which I noted above "quotes verbatim from the *Journal of a Slave Trader* by John Newton" (Eckstein, p. 114), is distinct from the other narratives in the novel in a number of aspects. Meticulously recording the details of Hamilton's trading journey along the west coast of Africa, it is strictly chronological and written in a matter-of-fact tone of "commercial detachment" (Phillips, p. 119). As Low points out (p. 137), this can be poignantly seen in how Hamilton describes his response to an attempted rebellion by his newly taken slaves: "Surprised 4 attempting to get off their irons... Put 2 in irons and delicately in the thumbscrews to encourage them to a full confession of those principally concerned. In the evening put 5 more in neck yokes" (p. 114). Hamilton's emotionless record of torturing two slaves by slowly crushing their thumbs in thumbscrews is chilling, and indicative of a complete lack of empathy, and the likely lack of a recognition of the humanity of the slaves that enables it. This is present throughout the narrative and is a striking feature, particularly in comparison to the pathos of the previous two. It is therefore along this axis of evaluation that Hamilton is unreliable. Interestingly though, this emotionless portrayal is complicated by the insertion into the journal of two personal letters addressed to his wife, which reveal his longing for her, a longing "to dwell safely in [her] arms and revel in the imagined joys that [their] projected children will bless us with" (p. 120).

Hamilton's part in *Crossing the River* has been variously understood by critics, though it has not held a position of much priority in their analyses and in some cases, such as in Pichler's discussion of the novel, is omitted entirely. However, Ledent brings important aspects to light. Her overall reading of the novel is concerned with the literal and metaphorical crossing of rivers in each narrative, the latter referring to "the mental borders that need to be crossed again and again in order to meet others" (p. 110). She focuses on how Phillips explores the relations between individuals and in so doing problematises essentialisms, the binary of oppressor/oppressed, temporal chronology, and an

essentialised or romanticised idea of the diaspora. Within these terms, Hamilton's significance for Ledent is twofold: narrating the purchasing of slaves, he is both the preeminent example of people who are "unable to leave their thick-skinned self-centredness" (p. 122), and is the mechanism through which Phillips destabilises any romantic notion of the African diaspora.

He is also important for Ledent due to the connections to the father of the prologue and epilogue, which I suggested earlier caused an uneradicable haunting of each by the other. The result is a sense of diaspora in *Crossing the River* as a community held together by an experience of guilt and shame, as well as pain and survival: "the family love that binds father and children originally derives from an act of treason" (Ledent, p. 126). This is a crucial point to which I will return, akin to Low's insight that Martha's "diaspora of connectedness" is founded upon the "pain of original loss" (Low, p. 136). Ledent's interest in it is the way in which it displays Phillips' "heterodoxy and nuance" (p. 126) by refusing a "romantic view of the continent [of Africa] and the dispersal of its people... The diaspora he depicts is marked from its very origins by paradox" (p. 126). It is the guilt of the father that creates the "group" of those in exile – a group that Ledent (and Low) consider Phillips to treat heterodoxically by including Joyce. I will return to this in a moment.

That Hamilton is a partner in this originary shameful intercourse of the prologue, the founding violation of the African diaspora, Ledent argues, causes the title of the section to be ironic. "Crossing the River" suggests "a cross-cultural dynamics", but the narrative portrays cultural stasis and closed mindedness (p. 111). The section titles of the other narratives in the novel "give an equally misleading idea of geographical and cultural stasis" (p. 111). More specifically, in a novel concerned with the crossing of rivers "whether real or metaphorical" (p. 110), "the title hardly goes beyond its original concrete meaning....no doubt," she adds, "to suggest the lack of imagination of the man who unwittingly initiated the passages illustrated in the other sections" (p. 111). For Ledent, Hamilton stands in contrast to the fluidity, non-essentialism and disrupted temporality of the diasporic community which he initiated, registering as the negative example of a failure to cross the "mental

borders” between individuals, and as one instance out of many of Phillips’ heterodoxy in handling the African diaspora.

Low’s analysis largely compliments Ledent’s, though she is more concerned with its relation to the theme of kinship. For Low, Hamilton returns us to the master’s side of the story of slavery, reminding us of the “‘real’ history” (137), though she does not advance a reading of this as she does for *Cambridge*. As for Ledent, Low sees Hamilton as standing in stark contrast to the narratives of the father’s children. It is in where they locate the irony that they differ. While for Ledent it rests mainly in the misnomer of the title, for Low it is in the presence of Hamilton’s letters to his wife. The letters reveal a longing for affection and family that is completely expunged from the journal, and which he brutally denies to his slaves. As Low comments, in view of his longing for his wife “the irony of his enforced break up of slaves’ families and kinsfolk is lost on him” (137).

Although insightful, I suggest that Ledent and Low do not go far enough in their treatment of Hamilton. Taken together they present Hamilton’s connection to the guilty father. He holds a position of contrast – thematically, stylistically and in his handling of chronology – which bestows upon his narrative a sad irony, whether through the misnomer of the title or the longing for family in his letters. For both of them, Hamilton is secondary: a negative, ironic contrast in relation to the exemplary narrative of Martha (for Low) or Joyce (for Ledent) in their demonstration of affective connection and kinship. However, the full ethical significance of the novel is diluted by this move, and Hamilton should rather be read in conjunction with Martha as constituting the interpretative core of the novel. I posit this centrality due to a number of connections between Hamilton and the other narratives that Low and Ledent do not consider. At the beginning of this discussion of *Crossing the River* I noted two points in support of Hamilton’s pivotal role: the historical citation in the section’s composition which places it in the same position as Part Three in *Cambridge*, and the citation of the novel’s title, which while ironic as Ledent notes also anchors it in the interpretative heart of the novel as a whole.

The question of citation is more extensive and critical than has so far been noted. In the first instance, Hamilton is connected by citation not only to Martha and the guilty father, but to Nash and Edward as well. In Hamilton's letters to his wife, we observe his anxiety to learn about the demise of his father, who was a slave trader before him. During the voyage Hamilton encounters "a certain Mr Ellis" of whom he enquires "after my dear late father" (p. 118). Mr Ellis refuses to give a satisfactory answer however, only suggesting that his father was unwise in his trading and hated the slaves, rather than viewing them with a "commercial detachment" (pp. 118-119). Hamilton "intimated that it was his Christian duty to let me set eyes upon my father's resting place," but Ellis "scorned the idea of any of my name claiming kinship with the Christian faith" (p. 119). Hamilton's next words to his wife exhibit the exact attitude of Edward and his father:

I confess that I was unable to respond to this charge, for indeed my father held dear to the belief that the teachings of the Lord were incompatible with his chosen occupation, and that it was folly to try and yoke together these opposites in one breast. (p. 119)

In the same way that Edward's father held "an aversion to the system which had allowed his fortunes to multiply" (p. 13), so Hamilton's father considered his "*chosen* occupation" (my emphasis) incompatible with Christianity. Yet both multiplied their wealth thereby, and their sons either continue to enjoy that wealth, as with Edward, or continue in the same trade. That this duplicitous – one is tempted to say hypocritical – attitude is reiterated in Hamilton's narrative is significant. In Part One, it was present simply as an ambiguity, obliquely condemned at the narrative's close. Its recurrence in a narrative that ironically contrasts with the positive narrative of Martha, however, makes this repudiation more overt.

More significantly, what the reader discovers in the narrative of Hamilton is the origin of an entire sequence of citations. I noted that the father cites Hamilton's account of purchasing his three children. During the exchange he tells us, "I could feel their eyes upon me. Wondering, *why?*" (p. 2). Suggestively, the children's thoughts are italicised in the same way as Hamilton's. Not this time a citation by the father, but rather the first in a chain of iterations set in motion by the father and Hamilton. Taken up subsequently in Nash's expression of despair at being abandoned by Edward, the

“Why?” is expanded to “Why have you forsaken me?” (p. 42). It is again cited and expanded by Martha in the opening paragraph of her narrative that I considered earlier: “*Father, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (p. 73). Each reiteration is slightly different, the chain of citation progressing to its fullest in Martha’s narrative. Occuring at the height of abandonment and suffering of the trauma and injustice of slavery, each citation is, I suggest, precisely a citation of this trauma. Phillips’ citation of historical documents here enters the narratives as a trope.

These citations are themselves a citation of the words of Jesus Christ on the cross: “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani’, which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34, KJV). The similarities are striking. Nash and Martha both die, not long after uttering these words, which in Christian theology are the supreme instance of despair, separation, and abandonment. It is particularly poignant that the fullest citation and development of these words of Jesus and the children is uttered by Martha whose narrative is not only the most marked by the trauma of loss, but also by the refusal of the possibility of returning east. She suggestively substitutes Jesus’ “My God” with “Father”, and the resurrection redemption that usually accompanies these words in Christian theology is absent in Martha, who “felt the sadness of not possessing a faith that could reassure her that, having served her apportioned span, she would now be ushered to a place of reunion” (p. 89). The separation from and abandonment by the father reaches its peak in Martha’s narrative, which is signalled by the chain of citation.

What we see then is that Martha’s narrative, the final link in the chain and, tellingly, also in italics, holds the centre of the novel with the contrasting narrative of Hamilton, who together with the father’s citation of him – trading with him – sets the chain of iteration in motion that Martha completes. As such, Hamilton is far more crucial than critics have noted, with important consequences for the novel’s ethical sense. The lack of recognition of the slaves’ humanity and the same desires for affection and kinship that marks Hamilton’s narrative, constituting what Ledent calls the paradox of the African diaspora, becomes determinative of the novel’s ethics in the same way as

in *Cambridge*. Low and Ledent are correct in noting the optimism of *Crossing the River*. The positive affirmation within it, however, is haunted by an ethical failure that is not simply a point of contrast, but is inextricable from the structure of the novel and its corresponding affirmation.

There is also an additional significance to the chain of citations. Apart from positioning Hamilton and Martha as the ethical and interpretative core of the novel, it raises intriguing questions for Travis/Joyce's narrative: Joyce has no direct citation in this way. An iterative chain that signals belonging to the African diaspora is, perhaps not surprisingly, absent in the narrative of a white Englishwoman in the twentieth century. This causes difficulties for Ledent and Low who, not without warrant, consider Joyce as being included in the diaspora. It is in part because of this that Ledent considers Phillips' treatment of the diaspora as heterodox, and why Low writes: "utopic vision of the last pages of the novel is inclusive, for Joyce who is English and white is included as one of the many sons and daughters of the diasporan community" (p. 139). Low and Ledent both refer to the moment in the epilogue when the father reports: "A many-tongued chorus continues to swell. And I hope that amongst these survivors' voices I might occasionally hear those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. My daughter. Joyce" (p. 237). If what I have suggested about the chain of citations and its impact on the ethical sense of the novel is correct, then this designation of Joyce as a daughter needs to be accounted for.

Low and Ledent locate their reasons for the inclusion of Joyce by noting salient similarities between her experiences as recorded in her diary (which is also temporally disjointed) and those of Martha and Nash. Thus Low argues:

Joyce's loneliness, her failed marriage with the miner Len, her embittered confrontations with a mother that [sic] did not want her, her betrayal by first [sic] lover Herbert, and her desire for someone to love are in many ways permutations of the essential matrix of love, desire, and yearning that runs through the narratives. (p. 138)

On one level this cannot be refuted. Joyce's narrative does show us a life of exclusion and difficulty, of loneliness and longing, poignantly summarised in her emotional meeting of Travis on the station platform when he briefly returns from the front to marry her: "And then he reached out and pulled

me towards him. I couldn't believe it. He's come back to me. He really wanted me. That day, crying on the platform, safe in Travis's arms" (p. 226). As Low notes, Joyce is also an outsider in the village, excluded. The diary entry describing the GI's arrival "registers the soldiers' marginality as much as hers" (p. 138). It is only with Travis that her loneliness and exclusion is briefly assuaged.

This argument is taken a step further by Ledent. She argues that despite "obvious differences, Joyce can also be regarded as a slave of sorts, especially if, as she suspects, Len only married her to secure a shop assistant for his store" (p. 129). Like Martha and Nash, she needs "to fight to be allowed to read and is treated like a child" (p. 129). Further, Joyce is affected by the fracturing of the family caused by slavery, for when Greer is born she "is forced by social pressure inspired by racism to put up her son for adoption" (p. 127). More positively, for Ledent she is the character that stands in contrast to Hamilton's closed-mindedness: "It takes exceptionally open-minded people like Joyce to go against the grain of human meanness. Not only is she big-hearted, but she is also prejudice free" (p. 122). Her conclusion, therefore, is that Joyce is included in the diasporic community as a matter of "emotional correctness" (p. 134), while for Low it is similarly due to a commonality of emotional experience.

The difficulty with this argument is that it confuses characterisation with what we might call qualification. The loneliness and exclusion that Joyce experiences is surely not limited to her among all white English(wo)men, and it would seem strange indeed to extend the idea of the African diaspora so as to include all who experience "permutations of the essential matrix of love, desire, and yearning" (Low, p. 138). Rather than a matter of qualification in this way, I suggest that Joyce's experiences are a matter of characterisation. It is precisely because she is an outsider, blind to racial differences and politics, lonely and hurt, that the love between her and Travis is able to flourish. If she had been assimilated with the other villagers in her outlook – with those whom, Len confidently asserts, consider her to be "a traitor to [her] own kind.... no better than a common slut" for loving Travis (p. 217) – then she would never have married him, nor given birth to Greer. And it is in her union with Travis that I think we find the reason for her inclusion in the diaspora. Ledent's

observation about the similarities between her and her “siblings” in losing her son Greer is more to the point here (p. 129). It is not, however, a reason for her to belong to the diaspora as a matter of emotional correctness. Rather, she loses her child because she already belongs to the diaspora through marrying Travis and having a son with him, and is consequently subjected to something of the diasporan experience as dramatised in the previous narrative. She is, as it were, the father’s daughter-in-law.

It is not completely surprising then that despite the lack of a direct citation of the suffering and abandonment of the diaspora in her narrative, there is a second-hand report of it in Travis’. As with Nash and Martha, it occurs shortly before he dies. Joyce has just received the telegram informing her of Travis’ death in Italy.

The telegram didn’t say much. I had to try to imagine it. To die at first light on the Italian coast. Fear. Mud. Shivering cold. Noise. Silence louder than any noise. Mortar fire. A bullet. A young man screaming in pain, *shouting out for mercy to a God he no longer believed existed*. His flesh ripped open by hot, flying metal. A man with blood flowing like red wine from his open veins. In a strange country. Among a people he hardly knew. (p. 229, emphasis mine)

The imagined cry for mercy to a God he does not believe in resonates with the cries of despair that we saw with Nash and Martha, as well their loss of faith. That this is not the same sort of cry that would be uttered by his fellow soldiers is suggested by the lack of familiarity with those among whom he dies. Shortly after the GI’s arrival in the village, one of the officers tells Joyce that “a lot of these boys are not used to us treating them as equals” (p. 145): due to institutionalised legacy of slavery still active in the United States at the time, Travis hardly knew the white soldiers with whom he was serving.

Low is correct in noting that both the section and the novel end on a positive note. Greer’s seeking out of his biological mother as an adult “ends the cycle of pain, separation, and betrayal that echo through each of the four⁴³ main narratives” (p. 138). Greer is, notably, the only one apart from Joyce to survive, which brings us to the survival that the father speaks of in the epilogue (Low, p. 139).

⁴³ I assume that Low is referring to the pain and loss experienced by the slaves in Hamilton’s narrative, rather than Hamilton’s own yearning for his wife and hoped for children.

Reemphasising the positive aspect of the prologue, the father lists a number of voices that he hears in addition to that of Nash, Martha, Travis and Joyce, some of whom live difficult lives – a drug addict, a prostitute – but some of whom are more positive figures of resistance: “Brothers and Friends. I am Toussaint L’Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you” (p. 236). As Ledent notes, these other voices allow “past and present, famous, infamous and anonymous children of the African diaspora to make themselves heard” (Ledent, p. 117). All of these children, but particularly the father’s own, are “survivors’ voices”, who although having being sold, are “loved” (Phillips, p. 237).

I have noted though that this positive ending to the novel is haunted by Hamilton’s dairy. The penultimate sentence cites him again. “*Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl. But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved*” (p. 237). The “but” would position the affirmative connection between the father and his lost children as the privileged of the two sentences, as presenting, quite literally, the last word. Yet this is resisted by the centrality of Hamilton’s narrative due to the chain of citations. Contrastingly holding the centre with the reliable, poignant narrative of Martha, which iterates the impossibility of returning east, the novel becomes characterised by a certain doubleness. In Martha and Hamilton’s narratives: the pain of loss and the irony of causing that loss while secretly nursing the same pain; reliability and unreliability; temporal disjunction and strict chronology. Taking Ledent and Low’s insights further, Martha and Hamilton’s union in the guilty father and connection to Travis, Joyce and Nash through the chain of citations, gives the novel as a structural whole a doubleness in its ethical sense. An affirmative connection between Africa and its diaspora that is marked by separation and the impossibility of return; a love that is founded on betrayal; an ethical affirmation that has as its possibility ethical failure and the absence of recognition. Which is to say that the novel dramatises the difficulty of radical evil.

IV

In both *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* the functioning of recognition in the novel’s ethical sense has been seen to be on a more structural level and therefore more dependant upon the reader,

though the recognition is shaped by the careful structuring of the novels. These texts therefore contrast quite significantly from the works of Ghosh and Adichie. There is nevertheless a similarity in the predicates of these recognitions. Shaped as they are by the thematic content of the novels, the predicates show a concern with all three of the ethical themes discussed in this thesis. Two are of most concern to Phillips: the idea of the human, and the remembrance of historical trauma.

For the latter, we have seen Phillips trace a path through the ethical tensions that were raised by Adichie's representation of the Biafran war. Integrating fragments of historical witness into an emotionally powerful fiction, Phillips, like Ghosh, is involved in a work of excavating lost or suppressed histories while simultaneously fulfilling both of the ethical demands that accompany the task: the need for accuracy and the need for the horror to be felt. Phillips' structuring of *Cambridge* further exposed the gaps inherent within the historical record bringing to light the significance of the imagination for addressing this, which was particularly seen through the combination of a modern unrestricted narrator and the controlled voices of Emily and Cambridge. The most complex and nuanced of the engagements with this theme in this thesis so far, *Cambridge* and to a lesser extent *Crossing the River* are exemplary acts of remembrance of a traumatic past.

Phillips' negotiation of the idea of the human is also particularly notable. *Cambridge* in particular dramatised an ethical subject that is dislocated from itself, circumscribed in its autonomy, and shaped by its emotional responses to circumstances. The primary ethical sense of both novels, namely the failure to recognise a common humanity, is in this way carefully qualified. The humanity that the novels present as common across such a diverse range of narratives is deeply shaped by the discursive worlds in which they exist. As in the work of Ghosh, change only comes at a price, through pain and emotional distress. This nevertheless shows again the efficacy of the emotions for sparking intellectual recognitions. What sets Phillips' conception of the human apart from Ghosh's, however, is the question of self awareness. Through the use of unreliable narrators, Phillips' characters are seen as disjointed from themselves, and therefore rendered ethically vulnerable to their circumstances.

This understanding of the ethical subject will be explored further in the analysis of Ishiguro in the next chapter, for whom unreliability and a disjointed narrator are similarly critical.

The incorporation of religion into the narratives follows a similar pattern to what was observed with Ghosh. Forming a constitutive part of the discursive world in which his characters exist, religion is not addressed as a possible ethical framework as it is in Adichie. Instead, it is implicitly critiqued. Shown to be implicated with the project of colonialism, central to the discourse of civilisation in which Nash, Emily and Cambridge understand themselves, Phillips' work presents the clearest instance of the challenge posed by religion in the present. That is to say, Phillips' critique of religion as complicit and ultimately leaving the characters desolate, can be understood as precisely the legacy with which Adichie engages in *Purple Hibiscus*, as we saw in the previous chapter. Across these two authors' works, there is a sharpening of the ethical difficulty of negotiating this particular legacy of colonialism.

The difficulty of ethical impurity is most closely attached to the central element of the novels' ethical sense: a common humanity. Most of the characters' sense of self is articulated in a discourse that they wish to resist. Nash and Cambridge are both in epistemic situations similar to postcolonial theory, deploying the resources of the Enlightenment in resistance to it. Although Nash manages a degree of change and, we might say, escape that is beyond Cambridge, we saw that his loneliness and desolation indicate the impossibility of truly returning to a time before his immersion in the discourse of colonialism: he is ultimately unable to escape the shaping of discourse. In *Crossing the River*, the veracity of radical evil is particularly marked. The more positive ethical sense is structurally and thematically intertwined with the betrayal and ethical failure that is its condition of possibility. There is no affirmation of a common humanity, without the possibility that it will be denied and violated. In Ghosh's terms, there is always the possibility that the silence between individuals will be bridged by violence.

Ethical impurity is also important in the work of Ishiguro to whom I turn in the next chapter. Before bringing this discussion to a close, however, it is necessary to spend some time on the reading of the

novels that Timothy Bewes presents, and particularly the understanding of the ethics of literature that underpins it. While we have seen a certain amount of concurrence among critics that have written on these two novels by Caryl Phillips, the work of Bewes, whose analysis I have noted several times in passing, runs counter to this. In his 2006 article, “Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips”, Bewes argues that Phillips’ novels do not provide “corrective narratives, telling a previously untold or mistold story about the past” but are rather an “almost pure example of the *pathos* of literary failure” (p. 35). This “failure” is inextricable, for Bewes, from the text’s materiality, or contemporaneity, to which the “difficulties and ‘infelicities’” (p. 35) of Phillips’ work – namely ventriloquy and cliché – draw our attention. What emerges, Bewes argues, is that the novels are “caught up in a drama of literary possibility that is riveted to their contemporaneity” (p. 36). The broader argument, to which I will turn in a moment and which is more fully developed in his recent book *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (2011), is that this “drama of literary possibility” is the negotiation of an inescapable tension within literature, namely the “incommensurability” of the ethical demand to speak with the aesthetic impossibility of speaking adequately (2006, p. 37), an incommensurability that, he argues, is an event of shame and marks the materiality of (postcolonial) literature more widely.

In his article (which is replicated in the book), Bewes’ analysis of Caryl Phillips’ work in these terms focuses primarily on *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River*. Due to the ubiquity of ventriloquy and cliché in these novels, there is, Bewes suggests, no “authentic” voice present within them – neither that of the characters, nor of the author – and as a result *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* undermine the possibility of speaking adequately or authentically in the very moment of speaking. As Bewes puts it, in Phillips the “paradox” of “the aesthetic impossibility of speaking” and “the ethical impossibility of not speaking” “finds a ‘voice’ that is faithful to these impossibilities *as such*” (2006, p. 55). He therefore begins by noting that in Phillips’ work, especially those “dealing with slavery”, there

is an almost complete absence of authorial commentary and third-person narration. Not only are his stories told entirely through the words and reflections of his characters; those

characters are themselves, for reasons that are never specified, incapable of speaking 'authentically', on their own account or in their own voices. (2006, p. 43)

It is primarily the second sentence that is crucial for his argument. Noting that Phillips has "often been praised" for his characters' "authenticity of voice" (p. 44), Bewes goes on to suggest that in actual fact, "many of [Emily's] passages, especially those dealing with the physical appearance of the Negroes, read more like a satire of colonial speech" (p. 44). Further, her writing is "derivative" and "ideologically unreflective... inhabiting the literary discourse of a hegemonic, culturally dominant Europe" (p. 44), and is correspondingly riddled with clichés. For Bewes, the result is to make Phillips an "upsetting writer" because the "endless pages of derivative prose penned by his characters" are unmediated by any narrator and are thus coextensive with the novel itself (p. 45).

Ledent's reading of Phillips' work is for Bewes "the most prominent illustration" of the tendency to attempt to avoid this (p. 56), "to prize Phillips away from his characters by introducing a succession of secondary sources between his and their texts" (p. 45). This, he argues, neglects the materiality of the text itself. Specifically, he suggests critics are missing that "Phillips's ability to 'ventriloquize' his characters" (p. 46) is neither a matter of achieving "authenticity of voice" (p. 46), nor of "speaking on behalf of anyone" (p. 46): "The purpose of what has been called 'ventriloquism' in Phillips's text is rather the systematic evacuation of every discursive position that might claim freedom from implication in colonialism.... What we get... is the ubiquity of ventriloquy – voice precisely as ventriloquy" (pp. 46-47). There is no authenticity of voice. Emily's discourse is derivative and clichéd, as is Cambridge's, with the consequence that Emily's denigration of Cambridge's English as showing a "lunatic precision" applies "identically" to her own discourse as well (p. 48). In briefly extending this argument to include *Crossing the River*, Bewes argues that the voice of the guilty father of the prologue and epilogue does not exhibit "any pretense at realism; the voice... is disembodied, ventriloquized" (p. 49). Further, and most importantly, the novel "offers a structure in which, seemingly, each of the children sold into slavery in the opening pages will successively speak his or her experience, but in fact none of them does" (p. 49). For Bewes they are all, to some degree or

another, mediated, with Nash's discourse coming closest to Cambridge's as "a discourse of pure imitation" (p. 49). As such, Bewes argues that both of these novels respond to the ethical demand to speak precisely by dramatising, in the very event of speaking, its impossibility.

What is crucial to this argument, and runs into several difficulties, is that Emily and Cambridge's voices are not representative, that as characters they do not speak "on their own account or in their own voices" (p. 43). If the characters in *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River* are not ventriloquized in the manner that Bewes suggests, then the novels lose their paradoxical quality which, as will be seen, is crucial for his theoretical argument. As should be clear from what I have discussed above, the first difficulty is posed by the work of Eckstein. Published in the same year as Bewes' article (though O'Callaghan's, less extensive, article was published notably earlier, in 1993), it nevertheless remains unmentioned in the later book version of Bewes' argument. In his reading of *Cambridge*, there is one passage from Emily's journal that Bewes cites as an example of how "the level of overstatement in her narrative is so spectacular that many of her passages, especially those dealing with the physical appearance of the Negroes, read more like a satire of colonial speech than an attempt to achieve 'authenticity of voice'" (p. 44). The passage is, for Bewes, "a model of contrived racial and stylistic offensiveness" (p. 44). What this fails to take into account, however, is that many of these passages of "contrived racial and stylistic offensiveness" are citations. Although the one example that Bewes provides (and he does not give much more support than this, in either the article or the book) is not amongst those that Eckstein's research has shown to be a citation, another possible example that could be described in Bewes' terms, and is a citation, is the following:

Just after turning off the *island road*... a number of pigs bolted into view, and after them a small parcel of monkeys. This took me by surprise, and I must have jumped... However, on resettling my position, I discovered that what I had taken for monkeys were nothing other than negro children, naked as they were born, parading in a feral manner to which they were not only accustomed, but in which they felt comfortable. (1993, p. 24)

What this shows is that while there is one sense in which the passage cited by Bewes is indeed "contrived", namely, what Eckstein terms pastiche, the sustained imitation of the style of the earlier works. They are, unfortunately, neither excessive nor pieces of satire. Bewes' example passage is

carefully contrived by Phillips to be consistent with the cited racially offensive passages that he has incorporated into the novel.

In the course of my argument, however, I have noted that there is another way in which we might say that Emily is contrived and this precisely due to Phillips' method of pastiche and montage: while accurately constructed in terms of voice, Emily (and to a certain extent Cambridge) is created by this process to represent a specific ideological position. I suggested, though, that Phillips is not ignorant of this difficulty and that it increases the importance of the novel's prologue and epilogue, which add depth to Emily's character, marking the shift in her ethical and ideological position. This reveals a peculiarity that these two sections, in which we gain access to Emily's thoughts through the extra-diegetic narrator, are omitted from Bewes' argument. Indeed, it is slightly ironic, considering Bewes' emphasis on the materiality of the text, that without taking the novel's structure into account he asserts that Phillips refuses "to signpost his intentions or to offer moral or political judgements, *even implicit ones, on his characters*" (p. 45, my emphasis). Yet I have shown that Phillips does precisely this through the careful structuring of his works: the contrasting of Emily's and Cambridge's narratives in *Cambridge*, coupled with the impact of the prologue and epilogue, are precisely how Phillips conveys his moral and political judgements, how the novel transmits its ethical sense.

A final possibility for how we could understand Bewes' argument that Emily and Cambridge are "contrived" is that, if we assume Bewes accepts the novel as historically accurate and representative, he might be suggesting that nevertheless, because Emily and Cambridge are writing in a particular *form*, they are bound to those form's conventions. This reference to form could be inferred from (in addition to the wider argument) Bewes' comment that "[w]hat Emily calls the 'lunatic precision' of Cambridge's use of English.... applies identically to her own use and to that of the novel as a whole; to Phillips's use, to my own in this article; to literary language as such" (p. 48). However, in his discussion of the passage that he cites, this is not what Bewes has in sight, for it is precisely the content of

Emily's journal (the racial offensiveness, which is not dependent upon the form) with which he is primarily concerned.⁴⁴

It seems that Bewes' argument for understanding Phillips' ventriloquy and cliché in *Cambridge* as non-representative fails to be convincing. The characters are not ventriloquized as he suggests, nor does Phillips proceed toward "becoming-imperceptible" (p. 49). His all too brief consideration of *Crossing the River*, which argues that none of the three children speak in their own voices, is similarly unpersuasive. For Bewes, Nash's English is imitative "of the discourse of nineteenth-century British literary English" (p. 49) – though we do not know if he had any other English with which to write, having been raised and educated by Edward – and Travis's story is told through Joyce – though as became clear in my discussion it is rather that Joyce's story, in which she speaks for herself, is included because of her love for Travis. Martha's story meanwhile is mediated "in a combination of third-person narration and free-indirect speech" (p. 49), a point which, on the one hand, is peculiar as it implies that first-person narration is the only way to give "voice" authentically, despite the fact that free-indirect speech is an incorporation of direct speech into the narrator's own. On the other hand, this point is simply incorrect, omitting the prevalence of first-person narration in Martha's section. Further, Bewes does not consider whether Hamilton speaks "authentically" – a character that, as we have seen, is important beyond simply removing "any notion of asymmetrical guilt from the colonial project" (Bewes, p. 49). Bewes' reading of Phillips is therefore flawed. However, it is his theoretical understanding of ethics and the novel within which these readings are situated that is of the most interest.

It is crucial for Bewes to show that Phillips' novels exhibit this paradoxical character of both speaking and failing to speak, since this would be an instance of the incommensurability that he argues exists

⁴⁴ There is the added possibility that Bewes is referring to the fact, which I have pointed out above, that what is available for Emily to say is constrained by her historical moment, her archive in the Foucauldian sense. Yet if this is what he means, then the argument is generalised to the event of speech itself, broadening it to far beyond literature, in addition to omitting the fact that each iteration of discourse is done with a difference and does not negate choice (and thus some authenticity), neither within a particular ideological position nor – as we saw with Emily – between different ones.

between the ethical demand to speak and the aesthetic impossibility of speaking adequately, which he suggests should be understood as an event of shame. Bewes writes: "Appearing in the gap between the aesthetic impossibility of speaking and the ethical impossibility of not speaking, shame is an index of the inadequacy or the impossibility of writing" (2006, p. 39). He is attempting to read Phillips' work "by reference to the shame that is operative in it and around it – that is, in terms of its failure to communicate, its awareness of its failure, its strategies of materializing failure or of compensating for it" (p. 41): in Phillips' case this is the ubiquity of ventriloquy and cliché. Bewes' argument is therefore that shame should be understood as an experience of incommensurability and, consequently, insofar as Phillips' novels are incommensurable with themselves (expressing both the demand to speak and the impossibility of speaking) they are, in their contemporaneity, events of shame. As he states in the opening of his book, he considers shame

as an event of writing, a complex, in which the tension between the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of literature is brought into sensuous existence, made manifest in all its irreconcilability. Shame... is the material embodiment of that tension, a moment at which the formal possibilities open to the work are incommensurable with, or simply inadequate to, its ethical responsibilities. (2011, p. 1)

In order to engage with the understanding of the ethics of literature that is at work here, it is necessary to approach it through his arguments about shame.

Shame as it is understood by Bewes differs from shame as it is commonly thought of, and he spends a large part of his book arguing for his specific understanding. There are for Bewes two kinds of shame: instantiated and uninstantiated. The first is our (more commonplace) subjective experience of shame, while the latter is the event of shame – the event of incommensurability – which the experience registers (2011, p. 5). The logical dependency that Bewes posits, however, is reversed in the argumentation as he needs to show that experiences of shame are experiences of incommensurability, of the inadequacy of forms to their content. An important aspect of his understanding is that shame is not a subjective emotion (though it might be experienced subjectively). He writes: "I am here taking issue with certain treatments of shame that insist upon its subjective quality, for example, in the work of writers such as Giorgio Agamben and Emmanuel

Levinas" (p. 23). He pays most attention to Levinas' treatment of shame in *On Escape* (2003), however, taking issue with Levinas' argument that "What appears in shame is... the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself" (cited in Bewes (2011, p. 23)). Instead he argues, "Shame is a figure not of intimacy of the self to itself – or at least, if that is so, it is the very discontinuity of the self, its otherness to itself, that is emblematised in that relation. Shame... is a figure of incommensurability" (p. 23).

What Bewes omits in his rejection of Levinas' analysis of shame, however, is that Levinas does not neglect the importance of incommensurability. Levinas writes:

[Shame] is the representation we form of ourselves as diminished beings with which we are pained to identify. Yet shame's whole intensity, everything it contains that stings us, consists precisely in our inability not to identify with this being who is already foreign to us and whose motives for acting we can no longer comprehend. (2003, p. 63)

There is an experience of incommensurability, yet what makes this experience shameful is precisely its inescapability: we cannot reject the self "with which we are pained to identify". Levinas therefore continues: "Shame is founded upon the solidarity of our being, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves" (p. 63). Nevertheless, despite the primacy of its inescapability, the trace of incommensurability remains in Levinas' conclusion: "Shame is, in the last analysis, an existence that seeks excuses" (p. 65). It is crucial for Bewes to pry shame away from a subjective self. What is at stake in this becomes clearer when we consider the similarities between his and Levinas' understanding of shame.

In concluding his exposition of shame as not subjective, related to guilt, or extricable from its form (his three main hypotheses), Bewes makes an interesting comment: "the novel *itself* is thereby subjected to the shame... which is described by Levinas as 'an existence that seeks excuses'" (2011, p. 48). The deployment of Levinas' "last analysis" of shame after stringently arguing against it is revealing, suggesting the possibility of a rephrasing of his argument: insofar as the novel is caught in an *inescapable* incommensurability with itself – which, for it to be a true aporia, a true incommensurability, must logically be the case – it is an event of shame. It is thus not the "tethering"

as such to which Bewes objects. Levinas' structure of inescapability, of tethering to a locus, is present in Bewes' understanding of shame: so long as this locus is viably understood as the novel. Yet this is precisely the problem. Bewes argues that when a "work affects us with shame" it is due to the event of incommensurability (p. 22). However, to be affected with shame when reading is surely not to feel ashamed, to experience shame personally, but to be aware, perhaps, of shameful. This is usually in relation to *someone else* and is a matter of empathy. It is this movement of locating the shame in either a character or an author or the circumstances of writing which Bewes seeks to escape (p. 22). For the incommensurability in a novel to be shameful, it must be the incommensurability *in itself* that is the heart of shame, incommensurability *as such* with no need of a subject. So the crux of the argument is whether incommensurability as Bewes describes it is viably designated as shame. That this is problematic will become clear from a short detour through Derrida's "Force of Law" (2002).

Derrida's paper is organised around two key terms, "enforce" and "address", the one opening onto the question of law, or justice as law, and the other onto justice in itself, a distinction that Derrida makes from the start (2002, p. 233). Law, Derrida argues, is inextricably bound up with force. There is no law that is not enforced or enforceable. "There are, to be sure, laws that are not enforced, but there is no law without force, whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive..." (p. 233). Additionally, law is founded by an originary, performative force, which because it founds law, is not subject to evaluation or verification by law:

the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to *making law*, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no earlier and previously founding law, no pre-existing foundation, could, by definition, guarantee or contradict or invalidate. (p. 241)⁴⁵

Via a discussion of Pascal, who argues that it is necessary to follow what has force, and it is just to follow what is right, and that since it is not possible to make strong that which is just it is necessary to make just that which is strong, Derrida sharpens this difference between justice and law – the

⁴⁵ This is expanded in Derrida's close reading of Benjamin's text, where violence does not threaten law from *outside* law, but rather threatens from within, as that which can found a new law and is, as such, outlawed (pp. 267-270).

difference between force, or “justice as law” (p. 243), and “justice in itself, if such a thing exist” (p. 243) – concluding with a paraphrase of Montaigne: “Laws are not just in as much as they are laws. One does not obey them because they are just but because they have authority” (p. 240). Laws are therefore ultimately unfounded. “Since the origin of authority, the founding or grounding, the positing of the law cannot by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground. This is not to say that they are in themselves unjust, in the sense of ‘illegal’ or ‘illegitimate.’ They are neither legal nor illegal in their founding moment” (p. 242). As such, they are deconstructible. Because law is constructed, “because its ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded”, it is deconstructible (p. 242). In contra-distinction, “Justice in itself... outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible” (p. 243) no more than deconstruction itself is, leading to Derrida’s famous statement that the possibility of justice is the possibility of deconstruction: “*Deconstruction is justice*” (p. 243). That is to say, “Deconstruction is possible as an experience of the impossible, there where, even if it does not exist, if it is not *present*, not yet or never, *there is justice*” (p. 243).

In clarifying this, Derrida turns to the second organising English idiom: to address. He *must*, Derrida comments, address them, in English, addressing “infinite problems” gathered under the title of the colloquium at which the paper is being presented, *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. “Address, like direction, like *rectitude*, says something about law and about what one must not miss when one wants justice, when one wants to be just – it is the *rectitude* of address” (p. 245). Importantly though, “address always turns out to be singular. An address is always singular, idiomatic, and justice, as law, seems always to suppose the generality of a rule, a norm, or a universal imperative” (p. 245). Thus, in pressing further Aristotle’s insight outlined in the introduction, we get to the central aporia/impossibility of justice: “How to reconcile the act of justice that must always concern singularity, individuals, groups, irreplaceable existences, the other or myself *as other*, in a unique situation, with rule, norm, value, or the imperative of justice that necessarily have a general form...” (p. 245). To simply apply a rule or a law, might make one invulnerable against the critique of being illegal, but it is not justice: “[If I did this] I would act, Kant would say, *in conformity* with duty but

not *through* duty or *out of respect* for the law” (p. 245). “To address oneself to the other in the language of the other” is the condition for justice, but it is also impossible since “justice as law seems to imply an element of universality; the appeal to a third party who suspends the unilaterality or singularity of the idioms” (p. 245).

This deployment of the phrase “the third” is intentionally resonant with the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida comments that he would like “up to a certain point, to bring the concept of justice – which I am here trying to distinguish from law – closer to Levinas’s” (p. 250). For Levinas, justice is the absolutely singular, dissymmetrical relation with the other, the relation “to the face of the other that commands me, whose infinity I cannot thematize and whose hostage I am” (p. 250). The realm of law and calculation is, within this understanding, the realm of the third – that which arises from the ineluctable, never delayed, always already present arrival of another other who demands the same singular response. Faced with two singular others, calculation and questions of distribution and equality – of justice as law – arise. In this way, justice for Levinas, as for Derrida, is infinite, singular, and impossible – despite the fact that it is precisely the demand for justice that gives rise to the realm of the third, to law and calculation, which in its generality violates the justice of the singular address.⁴⁶ This is why in an interview of this subject, Derrida cites Levinas’ cry, “What should I have to do with justice, because justice is unjust?” (1999, p. 68). Nevertheless, in “Force of Law” Derrida “cannot be content to borrow a conceptual trait without risking confusions or analogies”, confusion and analogies that would be problematic due to some difficulties that he has with Levinas’ work (p. 250). It is sufficient, therefore, to simply note Derrida’s sense of this proximity by way of clarifying what he means by the singular impossibility of justice in itself. As a result of this aporia between the singular and the general, between justice in itself and justice as law:

Law is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it demands that one calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the *decision* between just and unjust is never insured by a rule. (p. 244)

⁴⁶ See *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1969). See also Derrida’s discussion of this text in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1999a).

What is important to emphasise, is that although justice and law are distinguished and are heterogeneous, they are also indissociable. Derrida comments, "Everything would still be simple if this distinction between justice and law were a true distinction, an opposition the functioning of which was logically regulated and masterable. But it turns out that law claims to exercise itself in the name of justice and that justice demands for itself that it be established in the name of a law that must be put to work (constituted and applied) by force 'enforced'" (pp. 250-251). There are consequently three aporias that Derrida notes, in concluding the first half of his paper, that are iterations of this experience of the impossible, which is the experience of justice: the *epokhe* (or suspension) of the rule, the haunting of the undecidable, and the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge.

It is unnecessary to go into these aporias here. What is important is the similarity between the incommensurability which Bewes argues characterises the event of shame in the novel, and the incommensurability between justice and law as Derrida details it. The relationship between justice and law could be rephrased in Bewes' terms: the impossibility of not instituting laws and rules of calculation and equity, and the impossibility of doing so adequately. As Derrida writes, "incalculable justice *commands* calculation" (p. 257). Law and those who act under law can never rest, thinking themselves just: to be just is an infinite task, never completed, never arrived. Justice is always to come. I do not want to press this equivalence too strongly, yet the proximity reveals that Bewes' argument on shame as an experience of incommensurability *as such*, stumbles, for the (similar) experience of the incommensurability between law and justice is not one of shame but rather of justice: "aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice" (p. 244). If one experiences this aporia (or one of the three specific forms of it that Derrida outlines), one is responding to the call of justice, approaching justice, even though one will never arrive. Bewes is, I suggest, for this reason unsuccessful in escaping the movement of grounding shame in another person, tethering it to a subjective self.

Derrida's work on the aporetic structure of justice and law is also helpful in clarifying Bewes' understanding of ethics. For Derrida, this aporia is not an excuse for inaction. Indeed, as we saw, the disjunction between law and justice is what enables law to be deconstructed and critiqued. Derrida notes, "This excess of justice over law and calculation, this overflowing of the unrepresentable over the determinable, cannot and should not serve as an alibi for staying out of juridico-political battles, within an institution or state, between institutions or states" (p. 257). In terms of the tension within literature between ethics and aesthetics for which Bewes argues, however, this is precisely what he seems to do. Bewes is responding to "habits of critical reading that seem to have become entrenched in the Anglophone literary academy and that presupposes a stable relation between what is present in the text and what is extrapolated from it – that is to say, between the aesthetic and the ethical" (2006, pp. 34-35; 2011, p. 52). Yet what is problematic in his response is that he posits the relationship between ethics and aesthetics as one of *failure*. This is after all the crux of his incommensurability: that literature fails to fulfil an ethical demand that it cannot escape. As such, his focus on the "event of shame" is a focus on the failure itself (2006, p. 54; 2011, p. 70).

It is more productive, however, to understand the relationship between ethics and aesthetics as more positive, as more similar to that between justice and law in Derrida's paper, and to invert Bewes' understanding of ethics in the process. Richard Kearney, in his book *On Stories* (2002b), argues that in considering the Holocaust, which is a central example for Bewes, the ethical obligation with which we are faced is simply that it be remembered. Among theorists that reject the more overtly narrative modes of doing so (such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List*) due to the imposition of a narrative meaning and coherence (which is for Bewes an aspect of the aesthetic failure of literature), it is unadorned testimony that is the most ethical way to remember. Kearney's response is worth citing as some length.

In reply... I would be inclined to say that even the most extreme form of what [Langer] calls 'anguished' or 'humiliated' memories, where the witnesses express deep anxiety about the lack of common ground between the reality they suffered and the words they are now trying to use, is still a form of narrative memory... For we are only able to experience the futility and

failure of survivors' narratives because they are *trying*, however impossibly, *to narrate* the unnarratable.... A story in ruins, granted, but a story nonetheless. (2002b, p. 196)

This is, to a certain extent, quite similar to Bewes' argument: that every attempt to represent the trauma of the Holocaust (or slavery) is bound to fail (which, referring to two specific historical traumas, is importantly different from Bewes' wider argument that narrative *per se* is always bound to ethical failure). Yet there is a very significant, if subtle, difference. For Kearney, narrative (in a broad sense) is the *only* way in which to remember (see also Kearney (1999)), as law, we might add, is the only way for there to be justice. The relationship between ethics and aesthetics is thus more positive, allowing for the possibility that narrative does not always fail – that although in some instances narrative is insufficient, it is not inextricably bound to fail. Further, it also allows for a consideration of other ethical responsibilities in addition to that of mimesis. For Bewes, the ethical demand on literature is oddly *singular* – to represent adequately. Yet, as I have argued, literature can do more than this, including to meet the need for past trauma (of the Holocaust, slavery, civil war, or whatever it might be), to be *felt*, an ethical requirement that literature is able to fulfil, and which I (as well as Eckstein) have argued Phillips' work accomplishes. Additionally, Bewes also neglects an important difference between the ethical remembrance of the Holocaust and that of slavery: for slavery is caught in the difficulties of history in a way that the Holocaust is not, with witnesses still living. In remembering slavery, there are larger historical gaps, silences, and conformities to colonial discourses which it is important to interrogate and explore, as Ledent and others have noted Phillips attempting to do. The question of the novels' relation to the past that they narrate is therefore more intricate than what Bewes seems to allow. My argument has been that a primary ethical focus of Phillips' representation of this past is the revelation of the failure of recognition.

The relationship between ethics and aesthetics (which is sometimes a tension), rather than being an event of shame, is therefore the basis for a multifaceted ethical criticism, as Phillips' work demonstrates. Yet while Phillips, in contrast to Ghosh and Adichie, narrates ethical failure, this failure can still be understood in terms of recognition, the term I have been developing throughout. I turn

now to bring this thesis to close with a final testing of this approach in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, a novel that privileges recognition, and with which I conclude this thesis.

CONCLUSION

THE RECOGNITION OF ETHICS: KAZUO ISHIGURO

I

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing for an approach to ethics in the postcolonial novel that focuses on the functioning of recognition within narrative, and that posits an understanding of the ethical that is marked by impurity, or what I have been calling the tragic, working to decentre the classical subject of humanism. In the novels that I considered I have tried to show that the characters' recognitions and related emotional responses are integral in the unfolding of what I have called their ethical sense, and that the ethics thus explored is often precisely marked by this impurity – which I have suggested is productively thought through together with what Jacques Derrida terms “radical evil”. In establishing this framework, I have taken my bearing from a number of specific theorists and philosophers. Most importantly, I drew from Martha Nussbaum's reading of Aristotelian ethics the understanding of the tragic complexity and impurity of the ethical, in which the evil and the good cannot always be neatly separated, which I utilised in conjunction with her analysis of the epistemological importance of the emotions for Aristotle. David Scott's work was crucial for extending this perception into the field of postcolonial literature, particularly his arguments that Nussbaum's ethical approach displaces the classical Enlightenment ethical subject, and his deployment of her articulation of the tragic as a critically productive description of the complicit critique of the Enlightenment in which postcolonial theory is involved; that is, how the terms of the Enlightenment must be deployed to critique the Enlightenment.

I qualified Nussbaum's approach to ethics by introducing the additional aspect of recognition. As Terence Cave outlines, the recognition scene, or *anagnorisis*, marks a movement from ignorance to knowledge and has a long and varied history in poetics. Since recognition is always the recognition of something, *anagnorisis* comes to designate a feature of narrative that is both structural and thematic, with the recognition's predicate open to variation. Indeed it has changed over time, expanding from

referencing Aristotle's original concern with the recognition of a nominal identity by a character to the movements of narrative and the processes of reading itself. It is precisely this flexibility of the term, however, that is productive as it provided a common approach to the novels while simultaneously allowing sensitivity to the particular ethical concerns that each one exhibits.

The subsequent chapters of the thesis unfolded a progressive testing of the efficacy of this approach. Beginning in the second chapter with two novels by Amitav Ghosh, we saw a tight and productive fit between the adumbrated framework and the texts. In *Sea of Poppies*, *anagnorisis* functions along the lines of Aristotelian orthodoxy, that is, working to disclose hidden nominal identities. In so doing it facilitates a problematising and transgressing of cultural divisions and essentialisms. This in turn feeds into the climactic ethical recognition of a common humanity buried beneath these divisions. In *The Hungry Tide*, *anagnorisis* functioned slightly differently, with the predicate of the recognition serving as the main ethical point of the novel, namely, the evaluation of human life as less than that of tigers. In the process of reaching this crucial recognition the novel explores the idea of a common humanity as well as a clear conflict of values: between the value of human life and the value of (endangered) animal life. I suggested that the novel should be read as sustaining the view of ethics where such a conflict can arise, even though the historical episode that is represented in the novel makes a clear stand in favour of choosing human life when the two values collide. It was possible, therefore, to establish in these novels both a clear connection between moments of recognition and what I term the novel's ethical sense, as well as a tragic understanding of ethics.

Changing author and setting, in chapter three I considered the two novels of Chimamanda Adichie. While the change in form altered somewhat the functioning of recognition in relation to the ethics of the novel, there was still a close connection between the two. *Purple Hibiscus*, as a *Bildungsroman*, was seen to be structured around a central organising recognition, which was explained through the recollection of several smaller recognitions that coalesced into the primary one. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, however, the recognitions were more dispersed. Nevertheless, they remained crucial in revealing

the ethical position of the novel on the mutual imbrication of war and ordinary life and the impact of this on the values of friendship, fidelity, and family. There was also a shift in these two novels from the clear tragic conflict of values that I had identified in the previous chapter. In its stead I located a negotiation of doubleness, of the need to simultaneously accept and reject a person or position, where the character becomes host to the tragic contradiction. It was at this point that I brought the concept of radical evil to bear for the purpose of exploring more fully the ethical implications of this form of ethical impurity. What emerged was an instance of the pervertibility of the good, as I explained it in the introduction, where the ambiguity of Christianity in Nigeria – its possible benefit and its possible perversion – coincided in the figure of Eugene.

This more Derridean impurity was also located in my analysis of two novels by the third author, Caryl Phillips. Representing the most dramatic shift in form thus far, the work of Phillips substantially altered the functioning of recognition in relation to the novels' ethical sense. It was seen that the fragmented character of the narratives, in both *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River*, meant that in contrast to the novels previously considered, character recognitions were decentred. Character recognitions, in so far as they occurred, served a more contributive function. I argued that despite this, the narratives as a whole could be understood to be structured, as it were, around recognition – or in this case, the absence or failure of recognition. That is to say, there is in both novels a structural recognition which gives rise to the novels' ethical understanding. In addition, I noted the role of unreliable narration for the dramatisation of ethical failure – in distinction from the work of Ghosh and Adichie. What did remain consistent though was the significance of the emotions as a means of gaining knowledge and navigating ethical situations. In each moment of recognition, the emotions played a crucial part. As a result, despite the differences between the authors, it can be said that a more embodied, emotive subject underpins the ethical sense of each of their works.

Threaded through this general analysis of the functioning of recognition in relation to the ethical sense of the novels was a detailed consideration of how that ethical sense manifests. There were

three broad ethical themes that I focused on, namely the ethics of remembrance, of the human, and of religion. Each of the selected authors clustered around these concerns to differing degrees and within different perspectives. We saw that the ethics of remembrance was raised across all three authors, though particularly poignantly in the work of Adichie and Phillips, while the idea of a common humanity emerged most explicitly, in slightly different ways, in the work of both Ghosh and Phillips. The ethics of religion was perhaps the least evenly addressed theme across the authors, functioning as one of the main (positive) ethical concerns in Adichie, and as a discursive context in Phillips, while it was least prominent in the largely secular novels that I considered by Ghosh.

In Ghosh and Phillips' engagement with the question of humanism, what emerged was the importance of an ethical subject that differed in important ways from the classical subject of the Enlightenment. In these author's works the bridging of difference through the recognition of similarities is both possible and important. It is not, however, easy. The characters in these writers' novels were seen to be irrevocably shaped by the interplay of differences. Deeti and Neel in *Sea of Poppies* understood themselves according to caste distinctions; Emily's self-conception in *Cambridge* was constructed in opposition to her understanding of slaves. In each case, the differences between people were not easily overcome. This historically and discursively located subject was further seen to be an embodied one. Across all three of the selected authors' work, emotions played a fundamental role in causing recognitions and their corresponding ethical changes. In nearly each case, the most deeply ingrained cultural and racial distinctions were breached through moments of vivid emotional intensity: moments of crisis in Phillips, emotional resonance in Ghosh, and the awakening of love in Adichie. The decentring of the Enlightenment subject was taken furthest though in Phillips. While Ghosh depicts the fundamental pervertibility of the space between selves, in Phillips we are introduced to a dislocated subject for the first time: Emily's unreliability reveals her ethical vulnerability. Although the ubiquity of the impurity of ethics corresponds to an understanding of the world where ethical vulnerability is possible, in *Cambridge* Emily is affected by it. In a situation not entirely of her own making, she is nevertheless required to make decisions for which she is

responsible. This is a crucial challenge to the traditional understanding of the ethical subject as possessing *full* – that is, fully free and aware – responsibility, and is also considered in *The Remains of the Day* which I will turn to in a moment.

Across all of the selected authors, then, there is a necessary invoking of humanism, which nevertheless presents a challenge to the Enlightenment ethical subject. The question of religion is closely connected to this. In both Ghosh and Phillips, religion is critiqued as complicit with the colonial enterprise, which we saw in both *Sea of Poppies* and *Cambridge*. Both of Ghosh's novels considered in this thesis also explore the possibility of syncretic and hybrid religion as a mode of discourse that is resistant to traditional humanistic thought. This, we might say, is taken up in Adichie. Exploring the negotiation of religious difference, and the possibilities of inculturation, *Purple Hibiscus* presents Catholicism as a viable ethical framework, while both of Adichie's novels critique the essentialising of the religious. The complexity of the legacy that is negotiated in a work such as Adichie's, however, is evoked by Phillips' own engagement with the theme. In his novels it is seen as an inextricable element of the discourse of civilisation to which both *Cambridge* and *Emily* subscribe, and which served as an epistemic alibi for colonialism. It is a difficult legacy to negotiate, as Eugene, Kambili and Nash show.

Finally, we can note a continual concern with the ethics of remembrance across the novels. It was observed that in Ghosh the primary concern was with challenging historiography. Excavating stories that fall beyond History's purview, concerned as it is with narratives of progress, Ghosh humanised these stories, deploying the historical situations as singular moments that require a singular emotional response. The ethics of the remembrance of past trauma was brought to the forefront in Adichie's work, particularly the tension between the need for accuracy and the needs of creative licence and for the commemoration of historical trauma to be affectively *felt*. This, as with the question of humanism, was developed in a more complex way in the work of Phillips. Navigating this ethical tension, he deftly folded it back into Ghosh's concern with recuperating lost or suppressed stories, through his narrative technique and the multiplicity of narrative voices and types.

Despite the overarching concern in this thesis with a general approach to ethics in the postcolonial novel and these three ethical themes, in each chapter I focused on the details of the ethical situations in which the characters found themselves. *Anagnorisis* has been crucial for this, functioning not only as central for the ethical sense of the novel, but as a hinge between the specific and the general, between the general consideration of these ethical themes and the particular circumstances in which they actually unfold. It is therefore useful to reiterate at this point that the critical approach that I have developed is productive for the analysis of the postcolonial novel as a suitable, if not privileged, form for engaging and exploring questions of ethics; an engagement that negotiates in particular the ethical difficulty that I have named the tragic, and which is characterised by the term radical evil.

II

In bringing this thesis to a close I want to return to the work of two critics that I discussed in the introduction, namely James Phelan and Adam Zachary Newton. Having already discussed the theory of their approaches to ethics in relation to mine, I turn here to consider their different readings of a common text, namely Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989),⁴⁷ and in the process situate my own account in relation to theirs. As a novel that is overtly a recognition plot, a feature which is of importance to both Phelan's and Newton's analyses, *The Remains of the Day* enables a final comparative location and weighing of the approach that I have finessed over the course of this thesis.

At first glance, Ishiguro might seem like a curious figure to include in a thesis concerned with ethics in postcolonial literature. Born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954, he moved to England with his family at the age of five and has lived here ever since. Never a colonial subject, nor coming from a former colony, there is a sense in which, Ishiguro is "unencumbered by the trappings of empire" (p. xii), as Caryl Phillips (1997) in the preface to his anthology of foreign born British writers comments. Indeed, Nico Israel (2005) notes that Ishiguro "has bristled at being called a 'postcolonial' or even an 'Asian' writer" (n.p.). Nevertheless, despite some critics considering postcolonial analyses of Ishiguro's work

⁴⁷ All references point to the 2005 Faber and Faber edition.

erroneous (Lewis, 2000, p. 13),⁴⁸ numerous such readings have legitimately been produced. Lewis writes that “Ishiguro is a writer who believes he is ‘*stuck on the margins*’, thereby aligning himself with the postcolonial emphasis on the marginal, the liminal, the excluded” (p. 13). Similar reasons motivated Phillips to include Ishiguro’s work (significantly *The Remains of the Day*) in an anthology that seeks to disturb the British “mythology of homogeneity” with “the truth... that Britain has been forged in the crucible of fusion – of hybridity” (1997, p. x). More specifically, to claim that empire is absent from *The Remains of the Day* is simply to neglect crucial elements of the narrative: set during the months of the Suez crisis in 1956, which is conspicuous in never being directly referenced, Stevens’ narrative, as will be seen in a moment, is firmly located in an Empire-wide web. It is no surprise that *The Remains of the Day* has received the most attention from postcolonial critics.⁴⁹

The narrative of *The Remains of the Day* takes the form of the butler Stevens’ journal of his motor trip “through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country” (p. 3). His ostensible reason for embarking on the journey is to enjoy the countryside while en route to a professionally motivated visit to Miss Kenton, a former housekeeper at Darlington Hall where Stevens is still employed, to investigate the possibility of her returning to her former post and thus enabling him “to complete a fully satisfactory staff plan for Darlington Hall” (p. 10). Only a small portion of his journal is actually used to record his travels, however. As Kathleen Wall (1994) suggests, the disproportionate amount of space that is given to his reflections reveals Stevens’ “concerns and preoccupations” (p. 31). Throughout his journey, he ruminates on his years of dedicated service to Lord Darlington, who was the previous owner of Darlington Hall (which now, after 200 years in the Darlington family (p. 10), has an American proprietor, Mr Farraday), assessing the ideals that have governed his life and his relationship with Miss Kenton while she was still at the Hall. As Stevens gradually travels further away from Darlington Hall, he nears the painful realisation that the ideals of service and dignity to which he

⁴⁸ See also Cynthia Wong (2005), for whom postcolonial readings are not erroneous as such, but are limited by the deployment of cultural stereotypes and essentialisms in their readings of Ishiguro, limitations that need to be exceeded (p. 11).

⁴⁹ See Sim (2010, p. 130) and Lewis (2000, p. 14).

dedicated his entire life and career have failed to deliver the meaning and worth which he thought they would bestow – and have instead exacted a high ethical and emotional price.

Stevens' record of the first day of his journey sets the trend: about a quarter of the entry is concerned with the travelling, while the remaining space is used to establish Stevens' thoughts on his ideals of greatness and dignity, his answer to the question of what makes a great butler. Exactly how Stevens understands this is crucial for the discussion that follows and is worth considering in some detail. As Stevens has not travelled far before, when he leaves familiar territory he "felt compelled to stop the car a moment to take stock, as it were" (p. 24). In doing so, he meets a curious "local fellow" (p. 25) who directs him to ascend a nearby hill to see what he claims is one of the best views in England. Upon making the summit, Stevens is met "by a most marvellous view over miles of the surrounding countryside".

What I saw was principally field upon field rolling off into the distance. The land rose and fell gently, and the fields were bordered by hedges and trees. There were dots in some of the distant fields which I assumed to be sheep. To my right, almost on the horizon, I thought I could see the square tower of a church. (p. 26)

It is a tranquil, picturesque view and one that stays with Stevens for the remainder of the day (p. 28).

Later, lodged in Salisbury where he writes the journal entry, Stevens reflects back on it. Noting that it is not the most "obviously spectacular scenery", he nevertheless locates

a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. It is, I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term 'greatness'. (p. 28)

"Greatness", Stevens continues, "is the very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle.... its sense of restraint" (p. 29).

Stevens' understanding of the "greatness" of what he considers a quintessentially "English" view leads him to recall extended discussions with colleagues over the years on the question, "what is a 'great' butler?" (p. 29), a coded way of also examining the "greatness" of Englishness. Citing the membership requirements of the Hayes Society, a "(fictitious) professional organisation [that]

flourished in the 1920s and early 1930s, and prided itself on admitting only the highest quality of butler into its ranks" (Lewis, 2000, p. 80), Stevens notes two criteria: a great butler must "be attached to a distinguished household" (Ishiguro, p. 32), from which the Society excludes "the houses of businessmen or the 'newly rich'" (p. 33); and, a great butler must "be possessed of a dignity in keeping with his position" (p. 33). It is the ideal of dignity that Stevens most directly connects with the hilltop view of the English countryside and its "greatness". Dignity is not, Stevens asserts, about "things such as good accent and command of language, general knowledge on wide ranging topics such as falconing or newt-mating", attributes that are of a "superficial and decorative order" (p. 35). For him, dignity is essentially about restraint, and is encapsulated in three anecdotes from his father's career as a butler, whom Stevens considers to have attained this ideal – though this is later undermined when we learn of his father's deathbed regret at the distance between himself and his son.

The first anecdote is a cherished legendary tale that his father frequently used to tell, of a butler who had travelled with his employer to India. While preparing for dinner one afternoon, the butler "noticed a tiger languishing beneath the dining table" (p. 37). Showing no signs of perturbation, he quietly informed his employer, who was "taking tea with a number of visitors", of the situation and requested permission to use the "twelve-bores" (p. 37). Shots ring out shortly after, followed by the butler re-entering the drawing room to tell his employer that dinner would proceed as usual, with "no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence" (p. 37). In the second anecdote, Stevens senior is chauffeuring several of his employer's guests for an afternoon drive. As the drive proceeds, they begin to mock his employer, and when the conversation becomes too insulting, Stevens senior pulls over, calmly and without visible anger walks to the rear of the vehicle, opens the door and gazes in at the occupants (p. 40). The effect is both to silence the gentlemen and to solicit an apology, though Stevens senior does not speak; "He had, it seemed, merely opened the door" (p. 40). The final anecdote is somewhat more disturbing and begins to reveal the price exacted by this ideal of dignity. Stevens informs us that his brother had died fighting in "the South African War while I was still a boy"

(p. 41). When the general who was responsible for his brother's death during "a most un-British attack on civilian Boer settlements" (p. 41) visits Stevens senior's employer for several days, he serves as the general's personal butler due to the visit's importance for setting in place "the foundations of a lucrative business transaction" (p. 41). Suppressing his feelings "of utmost loathing" for the man (p. 41), Stevens senior provides such excellent service as to warrant an unusually large tip – which he donates to charity (p. 42). Stevens thus concludes,

The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone. (pp. 43-44)

These characteristics, for Stevens, mean also that a butler is essentially English. Continentals – "and by and large Celts, as you will no doubt agree" (p. 44) – are only able to become "manservants" due to their inability to restrain strong emotion; "they are like a man who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his suit and his shirt and run about screaming" (p. 44).

Somewhat comical as it may be, this final, racially essentialising aspect of Stevens' understanding of dignity serves as one of the more overt signals that Stevens is not entirely reliable, through the attempt at including the reader in the racist claim by deploying the second person. It completes a chain of reasoning that Barry Lewis summarises as follows: "To be English is to be great, like the landscape; to be great, is to possess dignity; and dignity is epitomised by the great butlers" (p. 81). While fundamental to Stevens' own personal life and development, this ideal can also be seen to position him at the very centre of his conception of "Englishness". This is intentional on Ishiguro's part, who has commented that his goal was "to actually rework a particular myth about a certain kind of England [consisting of] ... sleepy, beautiful villages with very polite people and butlers and people taking tea on the lawn" (cited in Sim (2010, p. 50)). Stevens' regretful recognitions at the end of the novel, where he begins to allow other values to be counted, is thus also a decentring and critique of this myth of England. What is important to note, however, is that it is not only a certain conception of

“Englishness” that is under scrutiny here, but also Empire, that transnational expression of Englishness (Young, 2008).

Sim (2006) establishes that Stevens’ reflections on Englishness and dignity are dependent upon the “crucial role” played by “non-domestic inflections” (p. 133), that is, by the imbrications of empire. The story told by Stevens’ father undermines the close connection that Stevens draws between the English landscape and the ideal of dignity, which seems to rise “indelibly” from it (p. 134). As Sim argues, “The self-abrogating principle that Stevens cleaves to can certainly be considered a culmination of the emotional restraint that he valorises, but the implied ground of that putative wisdom has, so to speak, been shifted to India” (p. 134). The exemplary moment of dignity displayed by the butler serving in India means that, rather than being located in England, this exemplariness is instead located in the Empire. The effect is to inscribe the “outside history” of the British Empire into the heart of this myth of Englishness that Stevens seeks to embody (p. 137). A similar logic functions with the connection to the South African War, which brings the “greatness” of the gentlemanly houses and the Empire “face to face with the fact of ignominious violence” (p. 135), revealing the houses’ connections with imperialism. Although Sim’s primary concern in his analysis is the way in which this “interrogates some new rightist exclusions and ideologemes that emerged in the seventies and eighties” (p. 120) when the book was published, these colonial inflections are important for revealing the wider ramifications of the novel’s critique of Stevens’ ethical position.

The connection between empire and Stevens’ ethic of service is further strengthened by two additional points. The first I have already noted: the co-incidence of the Suez crisis with the present time of the narrative. John Sutherland (1998) points out that the absence of any direct mention of the crisis is “a vacancy so glaring that it must be intended” (p. 187). Indeed, the dates align almost perfectly. The prologue, in which we read of Stevens’ growing intention to embark on the journey to visit Miss Kenton, is dated as July 1956. As Sutherland accurately calculates, Stevens ends up travelling “at the end of August or the beginning of September” (p. 188). Sutherland goes on to

summarise the events occurring around these “[o]minous dates” (p. 188). On July 26, 1956 the Egyptian President “announces the nationalisation of the Suez Canal (owned partly by France and Britain)” (p. 188); by the end of July economic sanctions are imposed by Britain and France in retaliation. In September the “Dulles Plan for international control of the Suez Canal” (p. 188) is rejected by Egypt, while in October Israel invades Egypt, and France and Britain commence with bombing it. On 9 January 1957, Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister during the crisis, resigned (p. 188). The crisis came to symbolise the decline of the British Empire.⁵⁰ When Stevens, in an important scene in *Moscombe* to which I will turn later, thus mentions that he has met Anthony Eden and was concerned “with international affairs” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 197), it is powerfully signalled in its absence. As Lewis puts it, citing Joseph Coates, the Suez crisis is the hole in the centre of the “doughnut novel” that is *Remains of the Day* (Lewis, 2000, p. 99). If we consider Susie O’Brien’s (1996) observation that Stevens’ ethical code “reflects and supports the model of filial devotion deployed by empire to mask the enforced servitude of its colonies” (p. 790),⁵¹ then not only is it imbricated by empire, but the critique in the novel can be read as corresponding to the waning of empire symbolised by the Suez crisis.

The second additional connection to Empire nestles within Stevens’ understanding of the Hayes Society’s criteria for membership, particularly the attachment to “a distinguished household” (p. 32). For Stevens, the Society’s exclusion from this category of the “newly rich” is a “piece of out-dated thinking” (p. 33) and consequently, when we first read his reflections on the subject, he has rejected it but memorised the Society’s phrasing of the need for dignity (p. 33). This changes over the course of his journey however. On the afternoon of the second day, (for reasons that we will come to) Stevens is unsettled by realising that “there is a whole dimension to the question ‘what is a “great” butler?’ I have hitherto not properly considered” (p. 119). Upon further reflection Stevens comes to “believe that it is a prerequisite of greatness that one ‘be attached to a distinguished household’ – so

⁵⁰ See Sim (2010, pp. 53-54) and Rushdie (1991) and Schwartz (2011).

⁵¹ See also Tamaya (1992).

long as one takes 'distinguished' here to have a meaning deeper than that understood by the Hayes Society" (p. 119). For Stevens, this is a matter of a generational difference. The previous generation of butlers, that of Stevens' father, "tended to see the world in terms of a ladder" (p. 121), with royalty at the top and the newly rich at the bottom. Stevens' generation, however, "tended to concern [themselves] much more with the *moral* status of an employer", that is, employers "who were, so to speak, furthering the progress of humanity" (p. 120). This understanding of the world is figured for Stevens in the image of a wheel, "revolving with the great houses at the hub, their mighty decisions emanating out to all else, rich and poor, who revolved around them" (p. 122). The nearer a house is to the "hub" of the wheel, the more (morally) distinguished it is – whether newly rich or not. Stevens states that it would therefore be worthy to serve "a gentleman such as Mr George Ketteridge, who, however humble his beginnings, has made an undeniable contribution to the future well-being of *the empire*" (p. 120, my emphasis). The mention of the empire (used as a parallel description of "furthering the progress of humanity" (p. 122), or "serving humanity" (p. 123)) enacts a similar move to the story of the butler serving his employer in India, inscribing into the centre that which is considered to lie at a safe distance on the periphery.

What we see then are that the two pillars according to which Stevens assesses his life, according to which he measures his success at achieving the moral status of a "great" butler, are linked with colonialism on a number of levels and thus increase the scope of the final recognition's impact. This picture is immediately complicated, however, since these statements of Stevens' ideals, although accurate, are caught up in the movements of a narrative that is deeply marked by unreliability. Brian Shaffer (1998) suggests that the metaphor of clothing, so important to Stevens' explanation of his ideal of dignity, "announces one of the novel's chief concerns and controlling metaphors: the literal and figurative ways by which the butler clothes his private self from his own understanding and from the 'public gaze'" (p. 65). The motif of clothing proliferates beyond the instances already cited. When Stevens later reiterates his understanding of dignity, it "comes down to not removing one's clothing in public" (p. 221); he is also preoccupied with his "costume" (pp. 11, 20), worries about the possible

damage to it while walking across a field to the village of Moscombe (p. 171); and he justifies as a matter of principle his guarded response to Miss Kenton when she surprises him reading a “sentimental love story” (p. 176) – a butler “cannot be seen casting [his role] aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume” (p. 178). The concealing function of clothing is balanced, Shaffer goes on to note, by its ability to reveal (1998, p. 66). And it is precisely the warp and woof of this concealment and disclosure that constitutes Stevens’ unreliability, which culminates in his final recognitions, and which is central for both Phelan and Newton who read the different ethical effects of this unreliability on the reader.

For Newton, *The Remains of the Day* (which he analyses in conjunction with Julian Barnes’ *Flaubert’s Parrot*) “addresses explicitly” what he argues for in an earlier reading of Mill’s *Autobiography* and Dickens’ *Bleak House*, namely, “writing *through* others in order to write the self” (p. 267). What this means, is that for Newton there is a fundamental “principle of indirection” at work in (fictional) autobiography (p. 269), which he earlier describes as “an ethics of secrecy and recognition” (p. 246). He writes, “‘You can’t define yourself directly’, [Braithwaite] says elsewhere, because one always must struggle with the form of autobiography, ensuring that it does not force one to miscalculate the delicate business of revelation” (pp. 268-269). Following Barnes’ narrator, Braithwaite, Newton calls this indirection “looking away”, a phrase that “offers us a final metaphor for describing the kinetic relation between revelation and concealment at the vexed heart of autobiographical fiction” (p. 269). As Newton’s use of Braithwaite’s comments implies, the interplay between concealment and revelation in Barnes’ novel is carefully controlled by the narrator. *The Remains of the Day*, in contrast, is characterised by accidents: “Stevens’ narrative works through the implications of accident as interruption and interruption as accident”, while Barnes’ text in contrast “rehearses an interruption of another sort, a governing structure of delay and willful juxtaposition” (p. 272). So although “each of these novels progresses toward an eventual anagnorisis,” Barnes’ proceeds “with careful deliberateness” while Ishiguro’s approaches recognition only “under the pressure of accreted accidents” (p. 273).

There are three “stories” identified by Newton that “contend within” Stevens, each of which is marked by accident and interruption (p. 281). The first is the story of the physical journey. Though Newton only implies this, it will be seen that two crucial moments in Stevens’ discourse are the result of car troubles that force him to deviate from his planned itinerary.⁵² Amid the “formal divisions” (p. 281) of the travelogue is the second story of Stevens’ reminiscences, structured by the associational logic of his memory. In a sequence also mapped by Kathleen Wall (p. 32), on day three Stevens arrives at Taunton and spots a sign to Mursden, the former home of “Griffen and Co.,” suppliers of “undoubtedly the finest silver polish available” before the war (p. 141). This causes him to remember an incident in his career shortly before the war, when his excellent polishing of the silver at Darlington Hall helped soothe Lord Halifax’s mood before a secret meeting with Herr Ribbentrop the German ambassador. The mention of Herr Ribbentrop subsequently leads Stevens to defend Lord Darlington against accusations of anti-Semitism and his alleged “close association” with the “British Union of Fascists” (p. 145). Reining in his wandering thoughts with the comment, “But I drift” (p. 146), he then proceeds, “[in] an absolute non-sequitor” (Wall, p. 32), to consider the importance of working for “great gentlemen who further the cause of humanity” (p. 147) and designates Lord Darlington as one of them. Finally returning to the present, he recollects some recent polishing errors that he made while serving Mr Farraday. For Newton, this sequence is an instance of the “background flux of reveries and association” that constructs Stevens’ “‘accidental’ autobiography” (p. 281). For Wall, this chain of associations is an instance of Stevens’ unreliability: his assertion that “his value as a professional is assured by that of the master he has served”, when he is fully aware “that Lord Darlington’s career has been a ‘waste’... reveals his tendency to compartmentalize his knowledge into bearable segments” (Wall, p. 32).

What Wall seeks to identify here would for Newton constitute part of the third kind of story that he observes, namely, Stevens’ reflections and thoughts on dignity and butlering. It is here, where we are invited “to look beyond to [the story’s] after-image, the ghostly counter-text of words and feeling left

⁵² See also Sim’s (2010) analysis of this in relation to Stevens’ guidebook *The Wonder of England* (pp. 46-48).

unexpressed, of averted glances, of the desire not to know" (p. 282), that Newton locates Stevens' unreliability (though he does not use the term). In this regard he is in agreement with both Wall and Phelan, both of whom note the foundational character of Stevens' ideal of dignity to his unreliability (Phelan, 2005, p. 51; Wall, 1994, pp. 25-26). That Stevens believes he can only relinquish his professional personae when he is "entirely alone" (Ishiguro, p. 44) means that, as Wall puts it, "the emotions or emotional turmoil of the private man must not be allowed to interfere with the duty and dignity of the public personae" (1994, p. 26). The emotional turmoil that Stevens experiences at two devastating moments for him – his father's death and Miss Kenton's engagement – are thus sublimated under the "dignity of the public personae" of the butler; or, in Newton's terms, we only see Stevens' pain as an "after-image" in these moments that are "defined by the structure of looking away" (p. 282), moments when "looking away" is increasingly represented as ethically dubious.

The first moment occurs during the final night of the 1923 international conference organised and hosted by Lord Darlington to discuss the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. During this weighty event, Stevens senior suffers a stroke and passes away. Choosing not to attend to his dying father beyond a brief visit, Stevens continues instead to fulfill his duties to the guests, in Newton's terms, deciding not to know, to look away. Stevens writes:

if you consider the pressures contingent on me that night, you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some modest degree a 'dignity' worthy of someone like Mr Marshall – or come to that, my father. Indeed, why should I deny it? For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph. (pp. 114-115)

Stevens' emotional turmoil at his father's death is thus, seemingly unconsciously, displaced into "professional triumph" (Wall, p. 27), and Stevens' pain is visible only in the scene's "after-image" (p. 282). For Wall, what is particularly significant is that we cannot be sure "how aware Stevens is of the indirect information he gives us about his frame of mind" (p. 27). As all three critics note, we become aware that Stevens is crying through other people's comments. Newton and Phelan seem to concur that this is an indirection congruent with Stevens' reticence (Newton, 1995, p. 329 n. 49; Phelan, 2005, p. 52). This seems to me to be the more persuasive reading, despite the remaining uncertainty

for which Wall argues, precisely because, with regard to the second such devastating moment in the novel, Stevens “seemed to be more emotionally honest earlier in the novel” (Wall, p. 28).

As this implies, a similar diversion of powerful emotions occurs when Miss Kenton announces to Stevens her engagement. Although neither Newton nor Phelan discuss it, this scene is worth noting due to the importance of Stevens’ relationship with Miss Kenton for his recognitions at the end of the novel, which is where the focus of Phelan’s analysis rests. Miss Kenton’s announcement of her engagement coincides with a secret meeting between Lord Darlington, the German Ambassador, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. After nearly ten years of serving in Darlington Hall together, during which time the reader is made aware that Stevens and Miss Kenton have fallen in love though neither admits it – Stevens not even to himself – Stevens is still unable to shed his professional bearing. It therefore becomes somewhat comical that Stevens describes the protracted, daily “coco [sic] evenings” with Miss Kenton, that were a tradition of years, as having an “essentially professional character” (p. 165). The reader is aware that this professionalism is a thin veneer hiding their unacknowledged romance. However, when Miss Kenton announces her engagement, Stevens simply congratulates her and returns to his post, diverting his (unacknowledged) pain into a “a deep feeling of triumph.... I had, after all, just come through an extremely trying evening, throughout which I had managed to preserve a ‘dignity in keeping with my position’ – and had done so, moreover, in a manner even my father might have been proud of” (p. 238).

Newton observes that during his narration, “Stevens sees most of his more flagrant self-deceptions deflate and collapse, and we witness the scales fall as he does” (p. 283). For instance we see Stevens admit that his actions towards Miss Kenton “render[ed] whole dreams forever irredeemable” (p. 189) (the moment of emotional honesty to which Wall refers). Almost immediately after admitting this, however, he reiterates that his meeting with Miss Kenton will be “largely professional in character” (p. 189), confirming again that Stevens’ insights into himself are fitful, and, as Newton observes, the “more painful... realizations are quickly covered up and suppressed; he looks away” (p. 284). Another

important self-deception to collapse (one that is not entirely separable from his insights regarding his relationship with Miss Kenton) has to do with Stevens' understanding of working for a distinguished house.

When Stevens first writes about the importance for greatness as a butler of being attached to a distinguished household, he is prompted to reconsider his earlier rejection of this criteria by "a small event... which has, I admit, unsettled me somewhat" (p. 123). During the day, Stevens is diverted from his path by the first of his car troubles: the Ford begins to overheat. Pulling into the nearest house that seems likely to be able to help – "a tall Victorian house" (p. 124) – Stevens receives aid from the chauffeur there. What Stevens finds disturbing is that in the ensuing conversation he denies having worked for Lord Darlington (p. 126). His explicit denial of any association with him brings to mind a similar incident with a guest of Mr Farraday's, when he denied having worked at Darlington Hall before Mr Farraday's taking ownership (p. 130). In both cases Stevens' interlocutor is curious as to what the infamous Lord Darlington was like. At this point in the narrative the reader is unaware of the full scandal surrounding Darlington, only being informed that there is a lot of "utter nonsense" (p. 132) spoken of him. Concerned to emphasise the inaccuracy of any suggestion "that I regret my association with such a gentleman [as Darlington]" (pp. 132-133), Stevens posits that he denies association simply to avoid the "unpleasantness" of arguing with strangers (p. 132). "Indeed," he continues,

you will appreciate that to have served his lordship at Darlington Hall during those years was to come as close to the hub of this world's wheel as one such as I could ever have dreamt. I gave thirty-five years' service to Lord Darlington; one would surely not be unjustified in claiming that during those years, one was, in the truest terms, 'attached to a distinguished household'. (p. 133)

It is not long though before we learn that Lord Darlington was (not falsely) accused during the war of being a Nazi sympathiser and anti-Semite. Once the war ended Darlington took the offending newspaper to court in an attempt to clear his name, but was unsuccessful in his libel action and his "good name" was thus "destroyed for ever" (p. 247). The dilemma that contributes to Stevens' unreliability so begins to emerge. As Cynthia Wong summarises: "Stevens knows what interpretation

history has placed on Darlington's life, but he cannot bring himself to admit this truth. To dissociate himself from his triumphant service to his good master, Stevens would lose all protective illusion of the usefulness of his life" (Wong, p. 61). He would wish to assert a feudal perception of his moral value, but ultimately fails. Stevens' moral self-worth is intimately tied to having approached the "hub of this world's wheel" (p. 133) through dignified service to Lord Darlington. For him to recognise that Darlington did not in fact "[further] the progress of humanity" (p. 122) would be to question his conception of himself. Nevertheless, as Newton observes, the more Stevens reflects on the past, the more he finds that he cannot sidestep Darlington's failures – most notably the dismissal of two Jewish girls from the staff, an action strenuously opposed by Miss Kenton, and which Darlington later regrets and recognises as morally wrong. Stevens continues to shore up his sense of self, however, asserting that he is "able to say with some reason that one's efforts, in however modest a way [in this case polishing silver], comprise a contribution to the course of history" (p. 147). The day before he is to meet Miss Kenton, a pivotal moment occurs in the village of Moscombe, when he finally begins to acknowledge Darlington's failures to himself.

Unexpectedly finding himself in the village due to his second accident – this time running out of gas – he lodges for the night with the Taylors. Word quickly spreads through the village that there is a gentleman staying, and it is not long before the Taylors' home is crowded with local characters, all of whom mistake Stevens for a highborn gentleman. During the conversation, the question arises as to what distinguishes a true gentleman from someone who is merely wealthy; Stevens of course replies, "dignity" (p. 195). At this point, however, he is confronted with a contrary understanding of the virtue, expressed by Mr Harry Smith (the name recalling the presence of Empire, with Sir Harry Smith having served as the colonial Governor of South Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, in addition to, as a number of critics have noted, signifying that he represents the common Englishman). For Smith, dignity is the freedom to express one's opinion:

That's what we fought Hitler for, after all. If Hitler had had things his way, we'd just be slaves now. The whole world would be a few masters and millions upon millions of slaves. And I don't need to remind anyone here, there's no dignity to be had in being a slave. That's what

we fought for and that's what we won. We won the right to be free citizens. And it's one of the privileges of being born English that no matter who you are, no matter if you're rich or poor, you're born free and you're born so that you can express your opinion freely, and vote in your member of parliament or vote him out. That's what dignity's really about, if you'll excuse me, sir. (p. 196)

Stevens finds this understanding of dignity "absurd" (p. 204). However, despite trying to attribute his "discomfort" to "the unfortunate misunderstanding concerning my person" (p. 203), it quickly becomes clear that he has been rather unsettled by this statement of opinion, with his counter-argument consequently taking up a substantial amount of space.

In order to defend his understanding of dignity, Stevens recollects an instance where Darlington and some visitors subjected him to a (rather humiliating) series of questions on global politics and economics. Their point was to expose Stevens as ignorant, and in so doing to demonstrate to one of the gentlemen present the ridiculousness of insisting on democracy: "Why, you may as well ask a committee of the mothers' union to organize a war campaign" (p. 206). While Stevens recognises that Darlington's views on democracy "will seem today rather odd" (p. 209), he insists that it is "absurd" to make one's dignity rest on having "strong opinions" on every matter: "Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation" (p. 209). To meddle in world affairs is, for Stevens, "beyond the understanding of those such as you and me" (p. 209), who consequently should focus on what they can do, namely, serve those for whom such things are possible. Stevens does qualify himself, however. One must not just bestow loyalty on anyone; one must find an employer of whom one can say, "This employer embodies all that I find noble and admirable. I will hereafter devote myself to serving him" (pp. 210-211). This, he says, "is loyalty *intelligently* bestowed" (p. 211). The next few lines, where he applies this to his own moral sense of self, are crucial:

What is there 'undignified', what is there at all culpable in such an attitude? How can one possibly be held to blame in any sense because, say, the passage of time has shown that Lord Darlington's efforts were misguided, even foolish.... It is hardly my fault if his lordship's life and work have turned out today to look, at best, a sad waste – and it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret or shame on my own account. (p. 211)

Stevens has been unsettled by Harry Smith's view on dignity, for it is precisely this approach to the world that Smith would consider "undignified". And if Smith is correct, it is not only Darlington's failures that might make Stevens "culpable", but his devotion to him as well. Asserting that he cannot be blamed for Darlington's errors –indeed acknowledging Darlington's errors for the first time – he forcefully stands his ground in "an attempt to dismiss feelings [of regret and shame] that hover around the edge of his consciousness" (Wall, p. 36).

Albeit fitfully and with resistance Stevens gradually approaches his final recognitions "under the pressure of accreted accidents" (Newton, p. 273). Yet there is an important qualification to be made here. For while I think Newton is accurate in arguing that Stevens' narrative is propelled forward and indelibly marked by the logic of accidental interruption and looking away, he also notes – though he does not go into it – that Stevens at times "consciously modulates" his recollections (p. 280). In Newton's argument this is a matter of the transitions between memories. Wall, however, considers it in more depth. Stevens, Wall argues, seems consciously to attempt a "re-examination of major principles" (p. 36). For instance, in the episodes I have just discussed, Stevens could have spared himself psychic turmoil if he had simply refused to finesse his understanding of what it means to be attached to a distinguished household. Despite the infrequency of instances such as this, they nevertheless succeed in "lessen[ing] the critically ironic distance between implied author and narrator, between narrator and implied reader" (Wall, p. 37). That is, Stevens can be seen to have an integrity that brings him occasions when, in fact, he risks undoing his whole identity as a butler by assessing his own thoughts, and thus increasing our sympathy with him; and this increases as we approach his final recognitions when, as Ekelund (2005) states, the tension is relieved and "narration and reading join in a common moment of *anagnorisis* as ignorance gives way to full knowledge" (p. 82) – though as will be seen Stevens' knowledge remains somewhat truncated to the end.

For Phelan it is Stevens' first major recognition that is the most climatic and important.⁵³ As the above indicates, the analyses of the novel presented by Phelan, Newton, and Wall have up until this point been mutually productive and in accord. It is at this point of giving an account of the ethical significance of Stevens' unreliability and recognitions, however, that they part ways. Phelan describes his divergence from Wall as a distinction between a rhetorical and a formalist approach to narrative: "Consequently, my discussion moves toward the ethics of reading, while hers moves toward the relation between contemporary ideas of subjectivity and unreliability" (p. 32 n.1). Even though Wall herself does not consider her analysis an ethical one, I will be suggesting that Phelan is mistaken in dismissing her approach as unconcerned with ethics. Phelan is correct, however, in making the distinction between Wall's more intra-textual analysis and his own which proceeds to the reader's response and the ethics entailed within this move. In this regard Phelan's approach is quite similar to Newton's. The difference between them, as I detailed in the Introduction, lies in Phelan's understanding of the ethics of narration as resting in narrative as an act of communication, while for Newton it resides in the obligations placed upon the reader in the moment of reading.

In the final section of the novel, Stevens comes to the painful realisation that he loves Miss Kenton (who has been Mrs Benn for twenty years) and that it is too late for anything to be done about it. Phelan writes, "As character Stevens is so overcome by commingled feelings of love and loss, recognition and regret that his heart breaks. As narrator, Stevens is so complexly reliable and unreliable that Ishiguro places the authorial audience in a very challenging ethical position" (2005, p. 31). Phelan agrees with Newton and Wall that, as Stevens proceeds on his journey towards meeting with Miss Kenton, "he shows intermittent signs of recognising the deficiencies of his ideals" (p. 32), but that it is "the meeting itself that leads him simultaneously to recognize and regret just how seriously mistaken his ideals have been and how much he has foolishly sacrificed for them" (pp. 32-33). For Phelan, then, the ethical effect of the novel is caught up in the interplay of reliability and

⁵³ Phelan's book *Living to Tell About It*, which I am following, incorporates an earlier article co-authored by Mary Patricia Martin, which constitutes the primary analysis of the novel's ethics. I will however be referring solely to Phelan, as it is his understanding of ethics that concerns me.

unreliability as it culminates in this interaction with Miss Kenton. Interestingly though, Phelan argues that Stevens' unreliability has been preparing us for the extended dialogue between Stevens and Miss Kenton, which "requires the same kind of inferential activity that reading Stevens' narration does": in the same way that we have had to negotiate the unspoken element of Stevens' narration, so this is required in reading their dialogue. The reason for this is the "combination of what we might call understating (the character-to-character equivalent of underreporting – they say less than they mean and so convey less to each other) and indirection (they say less than they mean but convey their meaning anyway)" (p. 55). The interchange between Stevens and Miss Kenton at this crucial moment consequently becomes ambiguous, with the ethical question for Phelan pivoting on whether Stevens should have responded as he did, rather than expressing his newly realised love for Miss Kenton.

In the scene, Stevens finally asks Miss Kenton "the first personal question he has ever asked her" (p. 55). Stevens has driven Miss Kenton to the bus stop, when he asks if her husband mistreats her since she has left him several times. Miss Kenton recognises that he is asking more than this and thus rephrases it: "I suppose, Mr Stevens, you're asking whether or not I love my husband" (p. 251). Phelan suggests that her own reticence prevents her from rephrasing the question Stevens is truly asking through his indirection, namely, "Do you still love me?" (p. 55). In her reply, Miss Kenton says that she has "extremely desolate moments" when she thinks "What a terrible mistake I've made with my life" (p. 251). It is at such times that she wonders "about a life I might have had with you, Mr Stevens" (p. 251). And it is then that she is easily angered and leaves her husband for a short time. She continues: "But each time I do, I realize before long – my rightful place is with my husband. After all, there's no turning back the clock now. One can't be forever dwelling on what might have been. One should realize one has as good as most, perhaps better, and be grateful" (p. 251). Phelan accurately paraphrases her reply as saying, "I used to love you, and indeed, loved you more than I love my husband now, but my feelings have altered and it's now too late for us to think about a future together" (p. 55).

Stevens' response is perhaps the most poignant moment in the novel:

I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking. (pp. 251-252)

In “the moment or two it took to digest” the reply, he is registering, “their subtext” (p. 55), namely, that she is telling him that there is no future for them together. Significantly, the scene is made more moving in that Stevens here shifts from unreliably underreporting his emotions, describing only “a certain degree of sorrow”, to full reporting, to fully acknowledging his broken heart (55-56). For Newton, this is one “of only three moments” where Stevens’ voice “changes register, as a world of secrets newly discovered wells up from beneath its occluded surface” (p. 273). In what Stevens goes on to say to Miss Kenton, however, he gives no indication of this shift, no indication of his recognition. He smiles and says that she is absolutely right, that there is no going back and that she “really mustn’t let any more foolish ideas come between yourself and the happiness you deserve” (p. 251). It is therefore precisely here, Phelan argues, that the “authorial audience” needs to come “to terms with the ethical dimensions of the discrepancy between Stevens’ telling and his acting in response to Miss Kenton” (p. 55).

The ethical challenge that the novel presents, for Phelan, is that it leaves two possibilities equally open: on the one hand, there is evidence that Stevens did the right thing in not revealing to Miss Kenton his emotions. On the other hand, it can be read inversely that this is precisely what Miss Kenton wanted him to do, and that in remaining silent he consequently erred again (pp. 56-58). “In short, we find that we cannot resolve the ambiguity of Stevens’ ethical position at this point in the narrative because we cannot clearly determine the implied Ishiguro’s relation to Stevens”, which is a “direct consequence of the character narration” (p. 58). Up until this point in the novel, “the narrative... has rewarded rather than blocked our efforts to discern Ishiguro’s positions behind Stevens’ narration” (p. 59), the work that Newton describes as discerning the narrative’s after-image. The result is that responsibility thus falls on the readers:

Because Ishiguro's particular use of character narration here blocks our access to conclusive signals about how to respond, the effect of his technique is to transfer the responsibility for disambiguating the scene to the flesh-and-blood reader, and the deciding factor in how we each carry out that responsibility is *our individual ethical beliefs as they interact with our understanding of Stevens as a particular character in a particular situation.* (p. 60)

The reader needs to make a selection from the "subset of Ishiguro's ethical norms [that] is most relevant to this scene" (60).

Additionally, the progression of the narrative up to this point means that we know more about Stevens' love for Miss Kenton and his hesitation at knocking, with the result that the reader has an additional "ethical responsibility": Our "sense of justice" requires that we recognise the fear and hope and confusion that compete with each other in the characters, a "recognition that leads to empathy" and increases "our desire for Stevens to act" (p. 62). We know, however, that he does not act, and thus our desire is frustrated, unfulfilled. Ishiguro does, Phelan argues, give us some satisfaction through the final encounter with the ex-butler on the pier at Weymouth. This figure, Phelan suggests, "is ultimately a stand-in for us" (p. 64), giving Stevens advice that we would like to give, advice that he accepts. "The emotional satisfaction of having Stevens's reality partially conform to our desire and the ethical satisfaction of seeing Stevens resolve to make something of the remains of his days combine to relieve the bleakness of the final situation. His anagnorisis has led not just to his pain but also to a new direction even at this late period in his life" (p. 64). However, Stevens immediately proceeds to underregard the value of bantering, leaving his change limited and thus realistic (pp. 64-65). Phelan thus concludes that "Ishiguro's communications to us... are a generous offer to share human warmth", a communication that through presenting the narrative of a character that loses that warmth, shares Ishiguro's concerns of the ways we as readers might miss it. "And that sharing is one that implies a deep trust in our ability to read the disclosures behind his many strategies of indirection – and, in the key moment of the narrative, to fend for ourselves. *The Remains of the Day*, in that respect, is itself an ethical act of the highest order" (p. 65).

For Newton, on the other hand, the ethical import of the novel rests in the “responsibilities incurred” (p. 19) when reading, when responding to the demands of the text. It is thus primarily the warp and woof of revelation and secrecy throughout the narrative that is of importance for Newton, rather than the final recognitions (of which Phelan only considers the first, but more on that in a moment), although they are not irrelevant. Newton argues that Stevens’ unreliability instructs the reader “a little in the art [he] calls ‘good waiting’: ‘that balance between attentiveness and the illusion of absence’.

This is the art not of occlusion but of double vision: keeping two surfaces co-present” (p. 284). Throughout the process of reading *The Remains of the Day*, the reader has had to keep in sight both the surface of the world through which Stevens “discreetly and courteously escorts us” (p. 270) and the surface of that world’s “after-image” (p. 282), which “emerges... mostly unbeknownst to him, through a sort of discursive double exposure” (p. 270). And since, as we have seen, the mechanism of the narrative is this “looking away”, according to which it is constructed and its after-image emerges, Newton argues that corresponding to this in the reader is “a kind of sympathy, as sympathy itself involves what Robert Unger has called a ‘recognition of comic incongruity’” (p. 269). The art of “good waiting” in which the novel instructs us therefore, is “the tactful capacity for recognition, for seeing ‘comic incongruity’” (p. 284).

The responsibility that for Newton is involved “when selves represent or are represented by others” (p. 18), as I detailed in the introduction, is “learning the paradoxical lesson that ‘getting’ someone else’s story is also a way of losing the person as ‘real,’ as ‘what he is’” (p. 18). In other words, there is the risk of relating to an entirely knowable image, instead of to the ungraspable individual. The “double vision” in which *The Remains of the Day* instructs us corresponds to this need to both “get” and “not to get” Stevens’ story. It is thus important for Newton that Ishiguro’s novel “contain[s] the sign of remainder” in its title. Not only are Stevens’ recognitions – and thus the reader’s – limited, but there is also an excess in “the day which is still left to enjoy”: in the novel “something is left over, inaccessible, unexposed” (p. 284). Newton therefore concludes, “And so, reading sometimes demands the contrary sign of looking away, of stopping short, of realizing that texts, like persons,

cannot entirely be known, that they must keep some of their secrets. It is, finally, the sign of interruption”, that is, the negotiation of indirection and maintaining double vision, “which identifies the reader’s share in the act of telling the self to others, the dialectic of revelation and concealment, of leaving home and looking away, of knowing and acknowledging, that is narrative ethics” (p. 285).

In turning to my own understanding of the ethics of *The Remains of the Day*, it must be noted that I do not wish to undermine either of these approaches to the ethics of Ishiguro’s novel. Indeed, I find each fairly persuasive and, in fact, complimentary to one another; one could say they are each concerned with different levels of ethics and their interpretation in the novel.⁵⁴ As should be clear by now, I regard the novel as a complex ethical object, with no single approach able to claim a total taxonomy. Although there are some approaches that I do fundamentally disagree with, as my discussion of Bewes in the previous chapter demonstrates, the work of Newton and Phelan is not such a case. With that caveat in mind, it can be said that my reading of the ethics of *The Remains of the Day* is located in one of Phelan and Newton’s points of overlap: Stevens’ unreliability culminating in his several recognitions.

I noted above that Phelan distinguishes his approach from Wall’s, designating hers as concerned with the understanding of subjectivity that underpins unreliability, rather than with ethics. This corresponds of course to Wall’s own description of her goal in the essay. Her description of the relation between unreliability and the understanding of subjectivity is nevertheless ethically significant, and worth quoting at length:

The standard definitions of an unreliable narrator presuppose a *reliable* counterpart who is the ‘rational, self-present subject of humanism,’ who occupies a world in which language is a transparent medium that is capable of reflecting a ‘real’ world. But if ‘subjectivity... is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak’, then we are forced to think about the issue of unreliable narration as a matter of degree rather than as the moral aberration of more traditional definitions. (Wall, 1994, pp. 21-22)

⁵⁴ Indeed, there are distinct similarities between their approaches that have begun to surface in my discussion, raising the interesting question of the extent of their differences. This is, however, beyond the present scope of discussion.

What has emerged from the above discussion, is that Stevens is precisely this kind of narrator. He is discovering himself as he speaks, interrupted by himself, disjointed from himself. Stevens is continuously recovering the ground of his memories, coming to a new understanding of himself in the process, which has implications for his ethics. In this way Stevens has some marked similarities with Emily in *Cambridge*; both are disjointed, disconnected from their thought processes. While with Emily it leads to naivety and the road which that places her on, with Stevens there is a degree of knowledge of his limited awareness – mainly because the ethical position that he rejects is, as we have seen, intimately tied to his occluded knowledge and sense of professional self.

The question that I ask, then, is does Stevens' recognition at the end of the novel further the decentering of a rational, fully self-aware subject that Wall argues is effected through the unreliability? That is, what happens at this moment to the understanding of ethics *within* the novel?

At the end of the novel, Stevens is sitting on a pier, and shares with a stranger his recognition:

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that? (pp. 255-256)

The flow of this passage needs to be considered carefully. Stevens is here still responding to Smith's understanding of dignity that he encountered the previous night. Then, he had reiterated his position on serving Lord Darlington and asked, "what is there 'undignified' in this?". Here, he realises that in not expressing his own opinion, as Harry Smith put it, he did not decide what was or was not worthwhile to do; committed to serving Darlington in whatever course he chose, he "trusted" that it was worthwhile. Having finally acknowledged the previous night that Darlington's work had turned out *not* to be worthwhile, he now inverts his defensive question into an accusation that echoes Smith: "what dignity is there in that?". Implied in this moment then is also a confirmation of the regret and shame against which he was fighting in Moscombe; indeed, the tone of the scene and his tears indicate that this is what he is feeling.

That his recognition, which is itself something of an ethical achievement, produces a distinct change is clear from Stevens' determination at the novel's close to pursue "human warmth" (pp. 257-258). However, before I turn to that, what critics seem to have passed over thus far, but which is crucial, is Stevens' final *defence* of Lord Darlington. In this moment of clarity, when he realises that his trust in and service to Darlington did not deliver the value and worth he hoped for – in other words, in a moment when Stevens would be most open to not defending Darlington – he nevertheless asserts that "Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all". To what extent is this another instance of Stevens' unreliability? Contrary to what seems to be a general consensus on Darlington's grave moral failing and betrayal of Stevens, I want to suggest that the novel actually presents Darlington in a somewhat ambiguous light, and that Stevens at this moment is not entirely unjustified. This is supported by the fact that two characters outside of Stevens' daily life make the same point about Darlington.

First, senator Lewis at the conclusion to the 1923 conference describes Darlington and his companions as gentlemen, but political amateurs. "All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen, let me ask you, have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming all around you? The days when you could act out of your noble instincts are over.... If you don't realize that soon you're headed for disaster" (pp. 106-107). And it is precisely Darlington's noble instincts that lead to his destruction: it is his sense of honour towards a defeated enemy that leads to his support for Germany. This is confirmed, secondly, by the young Mr Cardinal (who dies fighting in the war, making him something of a sympathetic character) who diagnoses Darlington's problem to Stevens on the night of the secret conference, the same night that Miss Kenton announces her engagement:

He's a gentleman, and he fought a war with the Germans, and it's his instinct to offer generosity and friendship to a defeated foe.... And you must have seen it Stevens. How could you not have? The way they've used it, manipulated it, *turned something fine and noble into something else* – something they can use for their own foul ends? (p. 234, my emphasis)

This is not to excuse in any way the significant error of Darlington's anti-democratic sentiments, or the seriousness of Darlington's act of anti-Semitism when he dismisses the two Jewish servants, but

to suggest a more nuanced and complex view of Darlington within the novel; to re-emphasise his regret for the dismissal – which I noted above – and to mention his motive – a mistaken concern for “the interests of the guests staying here” (p. 155) – as it is in these that Stevens finds refuge.

Stevens therefore recognises Darlington’s good intentions, and his courage in following his chosen path, even as he recognises that this path was the devastatingly wrong one to take and ended in disaster – for both Darlington and himself. What also passes unremarked, however, is the close parallel between Darlington and Stevens at this moment. Stevens’ description of Darlington could be applied to himself: “He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least” (pp. 255-256). Although Stevens did, as it were, sign over to Darlington his future decisions, he did make that decision largely by himself, though class positions would have had a part. And although he does not put it in these terms, we can see that Stevens discerns this, and rapidly retreats to it:

what can we ever gain in forever looking back and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? The hard reality is, surely, that for the likes of you and me, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one’s life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and me at least *try* to make a small contribution count for something true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations, surely that is in itself, whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment. (p. 257)

This has often been commented upon as a reversion by Stevens to his old habits. In some ways, that is true. Despite having realised the indignity of not pursuing his own opinion and thoughts, of not making his own mistakes, he is unable to abandon his view of the world as a wheel. Yet this passage is nonetheless saturated with his recognition: he does not renege on his assessment of Darlington’s failure, that he did not in the end serve a man who advanced humanity. What is important to note here is that he has rephrased his description of Lord Darlington and applied it to himself, though on a smaller scale: “it is enough that the likes of you and me at least *try* to make a small contribution...”.

Importantly, the last line of this passage references his loss of Miss Kenton; he has indeed “sacrificed much in life in order to pursue” his “aspirations” of making a contribution. We can thus see him sublimating the pain of his earlier recognition with Miss Kenton (the likely cause of this recognition, considering it is the only significant event between this point and his defence of his values in Moscombe) into his newly qualified ethical framework of the importance of trying to make a difference. In doing this, Stevens oversteps his recognition, pushing his new knowledge further than it should go: although there may be something of value in the sacrifice, it is not something of which to be proud and content. Nevertheless, his position has shifted and, considering his deeply ingrained emotional reticence, significantly so as he commits himself to pursue human warmth.

Unfortunately for Stevens it is at this point that the connections to Empire littered throughout the novel, especially the imbrications of the great houses with Imperialism, become pertinent. Stevens’ retreat from his culpability into his good intentions, anchored as it is in Darlington’s good intentions, are, unbeknownst to him, indissociable from what some might argue were the “good intentions” of colonialism. The framing of the novel therefore undercuts Stevens’ recourse to his good intentions even as it presents it in a sympathetic light, leaving the reader with a trickier ethical question to negotiate than what Phelan suggested. To what extent do good intentions remove culpability for evil? It seems clear that Stevens does not consider Darlington’s good intentions as absolving him from his failure, which is confirmed by the framing of the novel and the implicit critique of colonialism through Stevens’ recognition. Yet Stevens swiftly moves from acknowledging his own failure to congratulating himself for his good intentions. A possible answer might lie in the power difference between them. After all, Stevens as a lower to middle class man only had a limited range of choices with which he began. As we saw with Emily in *Cambridge*, the idea of a fully autonomous agent is here reiterated as a fiction. Nevertheless, the ending of the novel poses a difficult ethical question for which it seems uninclined to suggest an answer, leaving the reader not only with an ethical choice to ponder, as Phelan argues, but with an ethical dilemma to work through.

But what can we say about Stevens' new ethical position and its relation to the understanding of the human subject? For one, the recognition is only partially effective. He maintains his view of the world as a wheel, and he pushes his recognition too far to give himself peace. So even in his moment of anagnorisis, he is a limited, in-process subject. There is also the fact that it is his pain at the loss of Miss Kenton that leads him to the recognition, rather than the arguments of others which he shores himself up against, which reiterates the significance of the emotions that I have been arguing for throughout this thesis. What more can we say about Stevens as an *ethical* subject? Is there any sense in which we can say that he finds his moral value affected by "luck", that is, as Nussbaum uses the term, "what does not happen through his or her own agency, what just *happens* to him, as opposed to what he does or makes" (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 3)? Yes and no. At the start of the closing section, Stevens seems to be in precisely this position. He did not make his own mistakes, yet is feeling regret and shame. It is true that this is because of his own decision to serve Darlington, his own suspension of autonomy as it were, yet he nevertheless seems to consider himself culpable for mistakes that he did not choose to make. However, he sidesteps this quandary by reverting to that decision to suspend his own decision making, and importantly references the motives for that decision, leaving intact something like the Kantian idea of the good – and invulnerable – will. This is itself undercut by the framing of the novel and, together with his unreliability to the last, ultimately leaves the vulnerability of his goodness in question.

The differences between my approach to the ethics of literature and those of Newton and Phelan should now be clear. While their readings of *The Remains of the Day* are insightful and valuable, my focus on the ethical sense of the novel as it is structured around moments of recognition is productive for reading the text as a nuanced exploration of an ethical argument. The ethical concern that it considers in this case is the question of culpability in situations and outcomes beyond our control, that is to say, precisely the question of moral luck and the vulnerability of the good. *The Remains of the Day* only poses the question, leaving the final conclusion to the reader. However, it is a stating of the question that is nuanced and which engages the reader's emotional response to Stevens and the

particular contingent details of his life as it has been recounted. As such, the novel can be seen to affirm an understanding of the ethical subject along Aristotelian lines (an affirmation that is confirmed through Stevens' limited self-awareness and autonomy) even as it engages the more difficult aspect of such an understanding of ethics, namely, the question of unintentional culpability.

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Throughout this thesis I have approached ethics in the postcolonial novel through the lens of *anagnorisis* and a corresponding focus on the particular, emotionally charged details of character's lives. The specific ethical concerns thus raised were simultaneously related to the three ethical themes that organised this thesis. What emerged in this interplay between the general and the specific is the ubiquity of ethical difficulty and paradox. In each of the authors studied, I traced the necessity of navigating the ethical impurity that I have designated as tragic, and which is characterised by the term radical evil.

This ethical impurity, I have suggested, is tied to the legacy of the tragedy of colonial enlightenment. It is a specific instance of a wider aporia that marks the postcolonial, namely the simultaneous assertion and critique of the Enlightenment. The ethical concerns that have been considered, primarily the relation to the racial, cultural, or religious other and the correlative idea of the human, are thus folded into and interact with the complex legacy of colonialism. The result is the continual haunting of the postcolonial by the colonial, of ethical success by its enabling, inerradicable possibility of ethical failure.

Much of the attention has been on the need to negotiate the challenges of this legacy as it manifests in the question of the human. An aporia that has surfaced through this thesis, however, is the particularly difficult legacy of religion. I argued that the work of Adichie and Phillips presents the complex legacy of colonial religion in Africa. This picture becomes more complicated when we consider that the division between the secular and the sacred is a part of this legacy. The increasing

rise of fundamentalism makes an assertion of secularism imperative, yet the idea of secularism is caught up in the binaries fundamental to the Enlightenment understanding of man, a subsidiary of the binary of reason/irrationality. We have here then another instance of the tragic difficulty of the legacy of colonialism: how does one assert secularism without reiterating one of the foundational moves of the Enlightenment? Provoked by the engagements of the selected authors, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is an effective marker, however, for the pervasive reach of the difficulty of ethics in postcolonialism, a difficulty which, to be engaged with, the novel I have suggested is a well suited, if not a privileged, form.

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